INTRODUCTION

TIMA TESTIFIES

The date was March 4, 1953. It was 11:15 in the morning. The place was room 457 in the Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. Eight white men, dressed in suits, entered and seated themselves at highly polished desks on the raised platform. Six sat behind name tags: Senator William E. Jenner, Senator Robert C. Hendrickson, Senator Herman Welker, Senator John Marshall Butler, Senator James O. Eastland, and Senator Olin D. Johnston. Two were Democrats from the Deep South; the others represented Idaho, New Jersey, Indiana, and Maryland. The chairs behind the nametags for McCarran, Watkins, and Smith remained vacant. Robert Morris, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee's counsel, and Benjamin Mandel, its director of research, leafed through papers, stacking them in neat piles. Senator Jenner opened the hearing with a glance at Robert Morris, who announced, "Tima Ludins is the first witness."[1]

With deliberate steps a short, dark-haired woman, wearing a beige suit and a gold and white hat perched jauntily on her head, strode up to the tables facing the dais. Her attorney, Joseph Forer, followed her. The large hearing room was packed with reporters and other onlookers. After swearing her in, Senator Jenner asked her name. In a loud, certain voice

[1] U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary. *Hearings on Subversive Influence in the Educational Process*. 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 10, 24 February and 3 March 1953. 481.

she said, "My name is Tima, T-i-m-a D. Ludins, L-u-d-i-n-s, and my address is 222 West 23rd Street, and I want to say right here---" Senator Jenner interjected, “West 23rd Street, where?" Not missing a beat, Ludins continued, "New York City, where I have lived for 15 years, and I want to say right here that I am shocked and indignant at the treatment this committee has given me. You have made it appear in the press, even as far as last night, that this was some mysterious name, ‘Tima,’ with quotation marks, an underground party name, when right here in this committee yesterday it was established that that was my name, by which I was known, and by no other. What is this cloak-and-dagger mystery you are staging?"

Senator Jenner, aghast that the witness whom he had brought to interrogate would dare question his methods, sputtered, "This committee has done nothing of the kind, and I request that all the voluntary statements of the witness be stricken from the record."[2] Ludins continued to set her terms, "I want my name known by the press, and I think, if they have any decency, they will say this is my real name, not with quotation marks." Gazing directly at Jenner, she accused, "You have assassinated my character, blackened my name. I want to tell you something else---" Senator Jenner, trying to regain control of his hearings, stipulated, "I do not want to hear anything else from you at this time. You are here to testify as a witness. Again I want to admonish you that you are not to make voluntary statements. You are here as a witness. You have an attorney, and you are not proceeding with decorum." Ludins, disregarding the Senator's

[2] Ibid., 482.

admonition, concluded, "I am merely establishing that that is my real name."

Annoyed that this older, well-dressed woman had challenged his authority, Senator Jenner nodded to his counsel, Robert Morris, to proceed. Getting right to the point, Morris asked, "Are you presently a member of the Communist Party?" Ludins, as if to a child who had not been listening, patiently explained, "As I told you yesterday, I refuse to answer that question for the following reasons: first, it is an invasion of my rights under the first amendment--the freedom of conscience, of thought, and of association; second, this committee has no jurisdiction in education. That is a local and State matter; third, I stand on my privilege under the fifth amendment. This, not to bear witness against myself. I believe that the first amendment was written into our Constitution to protect the innocent as well as the guilty from persecution."

Senator Jenner, still trying to assert control of the proceeding, declared, "The committee will recognize your right to refuse to answer the question under the fifth amendment---" This time it was Ludins who interrupted, "However, I give all the other reasons." The Senator continued, "not for the other reasons stated." And Ludins, with an air of finality, finished the interchange, "However, they are the reasons that are mine. The committee may do as it wishes." A murmur went through the gallery: astonishment at Ludin's *chutzpah*.

Morris, his lines well-rehearsed, intoned, "Mr. Chairman, this witness was called today in the face of testimony in open session of one witness,

John Lautner, whose sworn testimony before this committee indicated that in 1949 and early 1950 he was engaged in organizing 500 Communist Party teachers into an underground, the plan for which had been brought from abroad by the leaders of the Communist Party sometime earlier. Mr. Lautner testified that a woman he knew who was named Tima, who lived at the Hotel Chelsea, was active in organizing these 500 teachers into an underground. Have you lived in the Chelsea Hotel?"[3] Ludins replied, "I have." "Do you know a man named John Lautner?" Morris queried. And, as expected, she replied, "I refuse to answer that question for the same reasons that I refused to answer the others."

The interrogation continued with questions about her name, political activities, trips to the Soviet Union, and work as a high school teacher. Back and forth, the committee attempted to squeeze from her an admission of guilt. Morris, cognizant that his badgering was futile, tried instead to impugn the integrity of the witness. And, the witness, well-equipped for this verbal sparring, maintained her dignity throughout. Not only did Ludins consistently deflect innuendo-filled questions but she was adept at using the hearing as a platform for her views. She engaged the senators in a discussion about the quality of U.S. education and castigated them for using paid informers.

Reporters from AP, UPI, the Washington bureaus of the New York *Times* and *Daily News*, and I.F. Stone's *Weekly* furiously scribbled in their notebooks as Ludins continued to turn the hearing into a platform for

[3] Ibid., 482-83.

decency. "Last night after the hearing I wanted a breath of fresh air so I went to the movies, right in Washington, and they were playing *Androcles and the Lion*. There was a wonderful thing in it. I must tell you about it, gentlemen. One of the captains, Caesar's captains said, 'Throw the Christians to the lions'--and they said, 'for security, because we lose our security if the Christians are around.' Then they told that to Caesar, and Caesar, who had a knowledge of history, said, 'For every Christian we throw to the lions, two new ones will jump up'--and gentlemen, for every teacher you are trying to pillory here, two new teachers will jump up."[4]

Senator Johnston, silent until now, piped up, "Communists, you mean?" Ludins, annoyed at the Senator's predictability, retorted, "I knew you were going to use that. Will you let me, please, finish? For every teacher, as I said, whom you are pillorying here, two new teachers will get up and fight for academic freedom, fight for the right of freedom of conscience in our country, fight for the right of freedom which our country has always stood for, and for every two teachers, 100 people will rise up. Every article on your committee begins with 'Since the committees have been so attacked in the last few weeks.' The whole country is going to rise against this kind of committee. They are going to put an end to it because this is the end of democracy, and we will come out with a strong democracy, with academic freedom of conscience, and return to the American traditions, in spite of these committees." And while the hearing continued for close to an hour, Ludins had said her piece.

---

[4] Ibid., 491.

This is the story of Tima D. Ludins, who fearlessly confronted some of the most vicious witch hunters of the 1950s. It is the story of one woman: a teacher, a political activist, an artist, a sister, a daughter, an immigrant, a secular Jew. In this, it is a story about institutions: the public education system, the Teachers' Union of the City of New York, and the Communist Party.

How was it that when masses of women were, or were striving to be, sequestered in the suburbs ensconced in roles of mother and wife, that Tima, childless and husbandless, was actively engaged in political activity, challenging male authority at the heart of the U.S. government? Was she an anomaly? A stray hair escaping from a well-coiffed role? Was she one of the tiny minority that always exists on the fringes of society, a renegade, out of step with the mainstream? It is possible to view her this way. Tima was never a mother, the period's most "natural" and assumed role.[5] She subscribed to the tenets of Communism, a "virus" that threatened to destroy American life. She was politically active in a union that did not legally represent the workers for whom she tirelessly advocated. She was a Jew in a Christian-oriented society. She was secular among an ethnic group defined by their religion.

On the other hand, Tima was an ordinary, tax-paying, middle-class, assimilated citizen who rode the subway to her teaching job for almost thirty years. She was a devoted daughter and sister. She cared for her

[5] This biography ends before Tima, at age 63, married printer and political activist Sam Tomash. After Tima and he separated, Sam was murdered in the South during the Civil Rights Movement.

parents and sister until their deaths. While her relationships with her brothers were a bit more conflicted, she established strong bonds with her nieces. Perhaps her career choice was emblematic of her life. Teaching and nursing were two of the few professions open to women in the first decades of the twentieth century. While Tima chose from among the range of conventional possibilities, she decided to train as a high school rather than an elementary school teacher. She chose this profession when high school teachers were overwhelmingly male. In this she accepted a traditional occupational role but pushed its boundaries. She was in the vanguard of a trend that eventually became mainstream.

Despite her detractors' accusations, Tima's involvement in the Communist Party was uniquely American. Her testimony in front of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS) was certainly calculated but her insistence that she was fighting for a "strong democracy . . . and a return to American traditions" was sincere. While she toed the Party line throughout her life, her daily existence was rooted in a particular New York City milieu: facing thirty students each hour of the day; laboring over union mimeograph machines, and balancing her checkbook to pay the rent for the apartment she shared with her sister. She had emigrated to the United States at a time when there were opportunities for class mobility, educational advancement, and relative freedom of expression. At the same time she attended cell meetings where she spent hours being instructed in Party politics.

If her politics were embedded in her American experience, they were also profoundly affected by her Jewish background. While she herself minimized her Judaism, it was nonetheless a factor in how she led her life. Eschewing religious traditions, as her parents had also done, was a continuation of an emerging strain within Judaism: secularism. Without the trappings of religious ritual, Tima understood the historical roots of her people, reinterpreted spirituality into a political vision, and remained embedded in a Jewish cultural experience.

Tima's life, as many lives are, was full of paradoxes and contradictions. It operated at many different levels. On the one hand, she was a devout Communist, dedicated to the overthrow of U.S. capitalism in order to create a more just society. She truly believed that a vanguard, hierarchically based CP could lead the way to a better life for all. In this she was a radical. Without addressing the rightness or wrongness of her position, without accusing her of wearing blinders, of being a dupe, it is possible to accept that she acted from her beliefs and lived a life true to her principles.

On the other hand, Tima was ordinary. She was a schoolteacher; she supported her sister's artistic ambitions. She frequently made the long trip from New York City to Peekskill to spend time with her biological family, attending to their needs. She undertook the unglamorous, unacknowledged work of a rank-and-file union member. She never strove for positions of personal power. The thesis that follows, then, is one way of telling Tima Ludins' story.

I first learned about Tima at the naming ceremony for the daughter of a couple in my chosen extended family. Joan Lefkowitz and Stacey Shuster decided to name their second child Mara, after Joan's great aunt, Tima Ludins. At the ceremony, Joan read from Tima's testimony in front of the Senate Internal Subcommittee. She and Stacey hoped that their daughter would follow in Tima's footsteps by growing into an outspoken woman who followed her beliefs (Mara, now nine years old, has already amply demonstrated these traits). I was moved by Tima's words and was happy to know that a member of my chosen family had been as courageous as Tima had been.

A year later, during an internship in which I processed an archival collection at the California Historical Society, I bumped into Tima again. I processed the papers of a private detective who investigated the activities of "subversive" groups in Los Angeles in the 1960s. Among other activities, he broke into the offices of political groups to gather information. Included in his papers were handwritten minutes of Women Strike for Peace meetings that he had obtained surreptitiously. None other than Tima Ludins had taken the minutes. I knew then that I wanted to find out more about this woman for whom Mara had been named, a woman who confronted democratic capitalism at its highest levels and who also assumed the mundane but necessary chores of political organizing. Undoubtedly the thesis is biased by my personal stake in telling Tima's story and by the sources consulted.

Several historical works help to frame the telling of Tima's story. Ronald Sanders, in *Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration*, details the circumstances that played a part in the exodus of Russian and Eastern European Jews to the United States starting in the 1880s.[6] He outlines the political, economic, and social reasons for the decision to relocate made by hundreds of thousands of families like the Ludins in the waning years of the nineteenth century. Steven Zipperstein provides an in-depth account of Jewish life in a particular Russian city.[7] Odessa, a place in which Tima's father spent time, had a well-developed intellectual and political Jewish community that provided a fertile ground for enterprising emigrants.

There are dozens of memoirs (by Bella Spewack, Michael Gold, and Rose Cohen to name a few) of Jews who grew up as first-generation immigrants in New York City.[8] These books provide vivid descriptions of the hardships faced by the newcomers as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the Jewish community. The best academic book on the specific experience of female Jews both before and after emigration is Susan Glenn's *Daughters of the Shtetl*.[9] In this comprehensive work, Glenn explicates the relationships among gender, class, and Judaism during the period in which

---

[6] Ronald Sanders, *Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988).
[7] Steven Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985).
[8] Bella Spewack*, Streets: A Memoir of the Lower East Side* (New York: Feminist Press, 1995); Michael Gold, *Jews Without Money* (Garden City, NY: The Sun Dial Press, 1930); Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side*. 1918. Reprint, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).
[9] Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

the Ludins moved to New York. While Glenn focuses on the Lower East Side's garment industry, an arena in which the Ludins were never involved, she provides ample detail about the conditions facing the mass of Jewish immigrant women.

Taking up where Glenn left off, Deborah Dash Moore chronicles the experiences of second-generation Jews in New York City.[10] In focusing on their geographic, social, and economic mobility Moore directly addresses life in the Bronx and the New York City public school system, both of which were central in Tima's life. Moore underscores how inextricably linked the process of Jewish assimilation was to the concept of being a New Yorker. New York shaped Jewish experience at the same time that the locale evolved to incorporate elements of Jewish values and customs. Having emigrated as a child, Tima grew up in New York City, absorbing that particular urban culture. As an adult she was practically a stereotypical image of a New Yorker: a female, Jewish, politically engaged teacher.

While education is one aspect of the Jewish experience that Moore covers, it is the exclusive concern of other historians. Stephan Brumberg traces the influence of the public school system on Jewish immigrant children in New York City during the early twentieth century, exactly the period in which Tima was a student, trained to be a teacher, and taught high school.[11] Brumberg explicates the dialectical effect that the public schools had on the Jewish community as well as how that community

---

[10]Debra Dash Moore, *At Home in America:Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[11] Stephan Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter In Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

influenced the educational system. Sherry Gorelick looks at the role of higher education, particularly City College, in the lives of first- and second-generation Jews in New York.[12] She deconstructs the myth that so many Jews entered the middle class because the Jewish religion valued education. She asserts that economic elites made higher education available to channel workers' discontent into new paths of occupational mobility. Gorelick's analysis is thought-provoking despite its lack of applicability to the particulars of Tima's experience. Tima actually used her position as a teacher as a platform for her political activism. Nonetheless, Gorelick is thorough in tracing the evolution of higher education and the role it played for many Jews.

While Gorelick ignores issues of gender, Ruth Jacknow Markowitz profiles the significant numbers of Jewish women who worked as teachers in New York City.[13] By 1960, the majority of New York City schools teachers were Jewish women. She discusses the interplay among ethnicity, gender, and class for these teachers and between the teachers and the school department. Focusing on Hunter College as the main training ground for these teachers, she describes the circumstances facing politically active female Jewish teachers such as Tima.

Much has been written about the unionization of New York City teachers.[14] Edward Eaton chronicles the history of the American Federation

[12] Sherry Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor: Education in New York, 1880-1924* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981).
[13] Ruth Jacknow Markowitz, *My Daughter, the Teacher: Jewish Teachers in the New York City Schools* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).
[14] William Edward Eaton, *The American Federation of Teachers, 1916-1961: A History of the Movement* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975); Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT & the NEA, 1900 - 1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,

of Teachers, tracing the origins and maturation of this national union until the period whenit was chosen as the collective bargaining representative of New York City teachers in 1961. He is concerned with the educational issues championed by the AFT and the inner workings of the union. Marjorie Murphy also discusses the unionization of teachers but with a greater emphasis on gender and class issues. Murphy thanked Tima in her acknowledgments for "insight into the trials of the radical and Communist teachers of the thirties."[15] Unfortunately, Murphy was unwilling to share her interview tapes with me when I contacted her about this thesis. David Selden rounds out the history of teacher unionizing by focusing on the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), a part of the union movement that Tima's local opposed.

Celia Zitron, a contemporary of Tima's, has written an insider's account of the New York City Teachers Union.[16] She writes from a CP perspective and does not pretend to be objective. Her history is remarkably similar to the way Tima might have told the story of her union. Zitron never admits to being a Communist, but it does not take too much knowledge of the period to read between the lines to determine that she is providing the Party line. Her account is in sharp contrast to the spate of memoirs by Communist Party members--from Al Richmond to Dorothy Healey to Jessica Mitford-- who have been very open about their roles in the Party.[17] These

1990); and David Selden, *Teacher Rebellion* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1985).

[15] Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, xi.

[16] Celia Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union, 1916-1964: The Story of Educational and Social Commitment* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969).

[17] Al Richmond, *A Long View From the Left: Memoirs of an American Revolutionary* (New York: Delta Books, 1975); Dorothy Ray Healey, Maurice Isserman, *California Red: A Life in*

histories are typically written from one of two perspectives: those who renounced the Party and need to put distance between themselves and their youthful indiscretions, and those who stand by their decisions to follow the Party's line.

Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes take a critical approach as they cover in great detail the history of the United States CP since its founding.[18] Other historians provide us with sweeping political overviews of the Party during particular periods of time. David Caute, Maurice Isserman, Harvey Klehr, and David Shannon provide a glimpse of Party politics at the national level since the Depression.[19] Others, such as Mark Naison, reveal Party workings at the local level.[20] Sociologists such as Nathan Glazer offer a demographic analysis of Party membership.[21] Glazer points to the unique make-up of the Party in the United States with its heavy concentration of middle-class Jewish members. He points out, with particular relevance to this thesis, that it is hard to separate class, occupation, and ethnicity when talking about Jews in the CP. While not able to unravel why North American CP membership was so heavily Jewish, he points to many factors

---

the American Communist Party (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Jessica Mitford, *A Fine Old Conflict* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

[18] Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992).

[19] David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978); Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and David Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism, A History of the Communist Party Since 1945* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959).

[20] Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c1983).

[21] Nathan Glazer*, The Social Basis of American Communism*. A volume in the series, Communism in American Life, Clinton Rossiter, Editor. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961).

influencing this phenomenon. Gerald Sorin takes up the issue of why so many Jews were attracted to radical politics. In his collective biography Sorin uses interviews, memoirs, and letters of 170 Jewish socialists to explore how class and culture affected this immigrant group's politics.

Vivian Gornick, daughter of Communists, has recorded a number of oral histories of CP members.[22] She has assembled a selection of segments from these interviews to provide a picture of the emotional and spiritual needs that the Party filled. These deeply personal accounts echo the role the CP played in Tima's life. Robert Iverson provides the bridge between histories of teachers unions, public schools, and the Communist Party in his investigation of Communism in the schools.[23] In *The Communists and the Schools*, the second book in a series about the effect of the Communist Party on American life sponsored by the Fund for the Republic, Iverson takes a measured, liberal view of the CP's stance on education. Written in 1959 it is perhaps the most comprehensive look at the interplay among the Teachers' Union, the CP, and the New York City Board of Education. There are several books that address the Cold War witch hunt commonly known as the McCarthy Era. M. J. Heale and Ellen Schrecker provide detailed overviews of the period.[24] In *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities*, Schrecker elucidates the particular way in which higher

---

[22] Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).
[23]Robert Iverson, *The Communists and the Schools*. A volume in the series, Communism in American Life, Clinton Rossiter, General Editor (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959).
[24] M. J Heale, *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Ellen Schrecker. *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

education was targeted by politicians; the process she describes applies to the way in which primary and secondary teachers were attacked as well.[25]

Annelise Orleck uses biography to discuss women and working-class politics in the first half of the twentieth century. In *Common Sense and a Little Fire* she profiled four female working-class political activists in order to "explore the tensions between their private lives and their public work, highlighting the links between personal experience and the larger processes of political change."[26] Acknowledging that she chose these four women in part because they left a substantial written body of work that discussed both their political and personal lives, Orleck points out that it is rare for historians to relate the minutiae of daily life to generally broader political, social, or economic processes. The book is an antidote to the invisibility of working-class women's lives in academic histories.

This thesis will take Orleck's work one step further by examining the life of a female political activist who was not a recognized leader. People who have achieved a certain status in life, either by birth or by action, are typically selected as subjects for biographies. The selection process makes accounts of ordinary people hard to find. Instead, historians who are interested in the lives of working-class people turn to social history, which generally relies on the study of aggregate data. In doing so it is possible to uncover broad trends but it is difficult to discover the richness of individual lives. In looking at Tima's life we can see how it was constrained and

---

[25] Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[26] Annelise Orleck*, Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics In the United States, 1900 - 1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 2.

shaped by particular economic, political, and social conditions. We can see the effects of Americanization on individuals, the occupational and educational possibilities available in the early twentieth century, and how a particular person used them. We will see how political consciousness was channeled into union and Communist Party activity. We will see the family life of a New York Jew. All of our lives are shaped by a combination of factors ranging from the economic system into which we are born, to our place in that economic structure, to our birth order in our families. This thesis will attempt to show the interplay between the circumstances of a particular individual and the broader historical currents affecting millions of others. It will allow us to know Tima in her various roles as sister, daughter, teacher, unionist, and political activist. Her experience was unique but her story has familiar threads for many.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LUDINS FAMILY IN RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES

Tima’s story starts in Russia with Grisha (1840-1889) and Bluma (1844-1919) Ludschinski, Tima's paternal grandparents, and Wolfe Richman and his wife, her maternal grandparents. Grisha and Bluma had six sons and two daughters: Naftulia, Duna, Lippa, Sonia, Volodya, David (1866), Leo (1870), and Grisha (1889). The elder Grisha's life was cut short when he fell into an icy pond and succumbed to pneumonia, shortly before the birth of his last son. Bluma ran a small general store after his death and Naftulia soon assumed the mantle of family patriarch.

No one remembers grandmother Richman's name, other than that she was called “*Babushka*.” Her husband, Wolfe, was a flour merchant. They lived in Mariupol, Russia, with their three daughters and four sons. Olga, their first, was born in 1873, followed by Manya (1875), "John" (1876), Isador (1881), Noah (n.d.), Adda (1885), and Abraham (1889). Olga, Tima's mother, was a well-read woman, who looked upon herself as a member of the intelligentsia. Neither the Richmans nor the Ludschinskis were observant Jews.

Her parents’ personal characteristics and the particular historic time in which David and Olga came of age strongly influenced Tima’s trajectory in life. David and Olga played an important and enduring role in Tima’s development. She admired both of them and, for the most part, lived her life embracing their values. David and Olga were intelligent, questioning, open-minded people. They cherished life, took advantage of opportunities,

and followed their hearts and minds. They walked through life with an unusual combination of pragmatism and vision. They were both leaders.

David and Olga grew up in a period of extraordinary change for Russian Jews. Industrial capitalism evolved, Tsarist rule deteriorated, and the seeds of radical change were planted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Worldwide economic and political currents touched them as Jewish life also changed from within. David and Olga made each decision about their lives against a backdrop of specific events in which their place as urban, secular Jews was paramount.

It can hardly be said that the Ludins were representative of the mass of Russian Jewish families. However, coming from an urban center as a well-educated, secular, politically engaged couple, they were emblematic of a small yet influential group within the Jewish community. The Pale of Settlement was a geographic area comprised of what is now the Ukraine, eastern Poland, Lithuania, Belorussia, and Bessarabia, into which Jews were forced to emigrate, as delineated by Tsarist decrees in 1795 and 1835. The area was not, however, a monolithic social-economic structure, because of its vast size. Jews, excluded from owning or working the land, settled primarily in *shtetls*, or villages, and were engaged in domestic work, artisanal occupations, commerce, trade, and prostitution. A smaller group of Jews collected rents for Russian landowners and lent money in the *shtetls* and surrounding areas. Historically, Jews had been active in distilling and selling liquor. The *shtetls* served as marketplaces for agricultural products brought in from the country and manufactured goods produced in the *shtetl*

or imported from afar. By the 1880s a number of Jews living in larger metropolitan areas, such as Minsk and Kiev (although legally barred from living there, too, unless they were prostitutes) worked in small factories manufacturing commodities such as textiles, tobacco products, and matches.[27]

Changes in the Russian economy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century affected Jewish communities in particular ways. As factory-based manufacturing grew, it displaced many who had subsisted on home-based production, particularly those in the needle trades. The expansion of the railroad system reduced the Jewish role as agent between urban and rural economies. Some micro-economies in the Pale suffered because of changing economic conditions in other parts of the world. For example, Odessa, whose economy was heavily dependent on the export of agricultural products, was displaced as a major supplier of grain to Britain by the United States' development of the railroads in the West and grain storage systems. Political decisions also contributed to a deterioration of the economy in the Pale. In the 1880s and 1890s the Tsar expelled about 100,000 Jews who had been allowed to live in Imperial Russian cities and Jews were prohibited from settling in rural areas, even in the Pale, where they had formerly traded in grain and timber.

---

[27] Numerous sources contain information about Jews in Russia in the nineteenth century, including Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, Ronald Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, Steven Zipperstein, *Jews of Odessa*, and Naomi Shepard, *A Price Below Rubies: Jewish Women as Rebels and Radicals* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

While politics had an impact on the economy, it impinged on Jews in other ways. Tsar Alexander II had started to reform feudal Russia during his reign (1855-1881) by freeing the serfs and instituting reforms in the military and judiciary. His benevolence extended to the Jews as he relaxed some restrictions on Jewish life, including the elimination of quotas for mandatory twenty-five-year service in the Russian Army for Jewish boys and the opening up of educational opportunities. However, in 1881, this liberalizing trend came to an end when members of the emerging Russian revolutionary movement assassinated him. Among the six people arrested for the crime was Hessia Helfman, a Jewish woman. David Ludins was an impressionable fifteen-year-old at the time. Alexander II's murder was the spark that inflamed longstanding anti-Semitism among most sectors of the Russian population. Widespread attacks (pograms) against Jews occurred in the months following the Tsar’s death, stimulating the beginning of a massive emigration to the United States.

While larger political and economic forces affected Jewish communities, the Jews managed to maintain fairly impermeable boundaries around their cultural-social-religious systems. Despite their participation in trade and their historic role as a people able or forced to transcend national boundaries, each Jewish community followed interpretations of the Talmud established by local rabbis and scholars and directives from the Kehillah, the communal governing body. By the mid-nineteenth century, segments within the community had opened up a space for those who felt constricted by the rigid rabinically based power structure: the Hasidim and the

Maskilim.[28] The Hasidic movement challenged the grip that elites held on Judaism by drawing upon Kabalistic mysticism and pietism. Ecstatic worship by the poor and illiterate was promoted, giving those unable to afford Talmudic study an opportunity to participate more fully in religious life. As opposed to the orthodox approach of the Hasids, Maskilim (followers of the Haskaleh movement) introduced ideas based on the European Enlightenment. Perhaps more than anything else, the Haskaleh movement, in its attitude about education and its "modern" attitudes about the role of women, provided a basis for the emergence of a new generation of secular, politically astute Jews such as David and Olga Ludschinski.

Laura Lloyd, Tima's niece, reflects on the Ludins' transition from tradition-bound to free-thinking people. "I think that her [Olga's] grandfather was a rabbi, I believe, I don't know which side it was on. But after that apparently nobody in the family, our branch of the family, was religious after that. They [David and Olga] never did holidays. The boys were not bar mitzvahed. My grandmother's side of the family didn't do holidays either. To my knowledge they didn't even own a Menorah. They were part of the socialist world. There were so many Russian socialists then."[29]

The Maskilim "believed that the key to Jewish emancipation and equality was the reconciliation of Judaism with modern Western ideas and practices. They saw education as the key to lifting the cloud of

---

[28] For more information on the Maskilim and the Haskalah movement consult Jacob Raisin, *The Haskalah Movement in Russia* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1914), Zipperstein, *Jews of Odessa*, and Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl.*

[29] Laura Lloyd, interview by author, San Francisco, Calif., 14 March 1996.

backwardness from Jewish life and advocated secular education for both sexes."[30] The Maskilim also recognized that women had historically been subordinated by the Jewish religion. While they advocated equality between the sexes, they hoped that Jewish men would assume more responsibility for supporting their families, freeing their wives to participate more fully in the domestic realm, to follow the model of gentile, middle-class families.

The Haskalah emphasis on secular education was supported by several factors, including the increasing urbanization that made it easier to establish and attend schools and incentives by the Russian government for boys to attend secondary school in anticipation of shortened military service. Jews now had a choice of attending the traditional religiously based “heders,” the Jewish-run secular “pensions,” or the Russian schools at the elementary level. Jewish attendance at Russian secondary schools, “gymnasiums,” while no doubt small in absolute numbers, doubled between 1870 and 1880. Even among girls, one-third of those living in metropolitan areas were literate in Russian, three times as many as in the female gentile population.[31]

Laura Lloyd reflects on her grandmother Olga Ludins, "Whether she was self-taught or not, I don’t know. She would have said if she’d gone to university. I don’t know how much formal education she had, I’m assuming as much as a middle-class girl had." In any case, the Ludins family assumed that family members would get as much education as possible and "they

---

[30]Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 33.
[31]Shepherd, *A Price Below Rubies*, 5.

couldn’t believe that when I married the first time, my husband wasn’t a college graduate.”[32]

Against this backdrop, Jews had a very high rate of participation in political organizations. Some were attracted to gentile-led groups such as *Nordodnaya Volya* (People's Will) and later the Communist Party, others joined Jewish-identified ones like *Am Olam* (Eternal People) and the *Bund*. There were plenty of opportunities for nihilists, socialists, anarchists, Zionists, and revolutionaries of all persuasions to join together to fight the oppressive political structure. Perhaps David joined *Am Olam*, a socialist movement that gained momentum in 1881 and had a strong Odessa chapter. According to one scholar, *Am Olam's* "goals were not always clear, but they seemed to include the spiritual and physical rejuvenation of the Jewish people through collective agricultural enterprise in the American West."[33]

David, Tima's father, was able to attend school and prepared for a career in architecture. Despite this training David had always wanted to farm the land. He had grown up on the fertile Russian steppes but was barred as a Jew from owning or renting land. His desire to engage in agriculture may have been fueled by his wish to disprove the anti-Semitic adage that Jews were bloodsuckers, living off the hard-working Russian peasants. At twenty, David went to Odessa to speak with Dr. Leon Pinsker, a leader who advocated the settlement of Jews in Palestine for agricultural

---

[32]Lloyd, interview.
[33]Gerald Sorin, *Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 45.

purposes. Unfortunately, Dr. Pinsker was unable to arrange for David to go to Palestine. Unclear about how to proceed, David stayed in Odessa; fortuitously, he met a woman whose brother was the superintendent of a Jewish agricultural colony in New Jersey. While David had never entertained the idea of living in the United States, his limited options forced him to consider joining the woman who was about to move to the colony, Woodbine.[34]

Woodbine was one of the projects of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, an outgrowth of the Jewish Colonization Association. Baron Maurice de Hirsch, an expatriate German financier and philanthropist, used his considerable resources to improve the situation of Russia's Jews in the late 1880s. Discouraged after many years of effort, he concluded that the Jews would never be able to rise above deeply entrenched Russian anti-Semitism. Changing strategy, he founded the Association to relocate Jews to more hospitable countries, particularly Argentina and the United States. De Hirsch voiced the aspirations of many, including David, when he said of agricultural colonization, "The poor Jew, who until now has been hated as an outcast, will win for himself peace and independence, love for the ground he tills and for freedom; and he will become a patriotic citizen of his new homeland."[35]

In 1891, Professor Hirsch Sabsovich greeted David as he walked down the gangplank of the *Prince Bismarck*, an elegant ocean liner in whose foul

---

[34] David Ludins, "Memories of Woodbine: 1891 - 1894," *Frontiers* (June 1960): 7-15.
[35] Uri Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880 - 1910* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 88.

steerage he had traveled. Sabsovich, the brother of David's traveling companion, was a well-regarded agricultural chemist who was charged with organizing the original sixty families to clear 5300 acres of land in southern New Jersey, build farmhouses, and construct a new town. The Fund decided to build a garment factory that was supposed to employ the families temporarily until the farms could become self-sustaining. David was accepted into the community despite being unmarried; families with children, who could help work the land and toil in the factory, were preferred. David threw himself into developing his land and integrating himself into the community. While he found a few kindred spirits among the other young, Russian-speaking, intellectual radicals, David also had to contend with the usual orthodox, politically conservative members.

Life in Woodbine was hard, but David and the other settlers persisted in their quest. They cleared and planted the land, built their own shelter, and constructed a schoolhouse, garment factory, and other community buildings. They laid down streets, dug sewers, and erected streetlights. David did not mind the hard work. He actually enjoyed crafting buildings, putting his education to practical use. His frustration with the older, more conservative members was tempered by his close friendships with the other educated, savvy, young men.

Apparently, he made a trip back to Mariupol about a year into his stay at Woodbine. In June 1892 he married Olga Richman. A short time later he returned to Woodbine, without his new wife. One day, a year or so after his return, David was putting up walls for a new building when another young

colonist, Jack Kotinski, came rushing up with news that the Fund had finally distributed papers outlining the legal relationship of the Fund to the farmers. The farmers were up in arms about the documents, feeling that they had been deceived by the trustees of the Fund. Jack asked David to organize a meeting of the farmers to form a strategy to deal with the situation. David agreed to ask the schoolteacher to suspend evening classes so the farmers could hold their meeting at the schoolhouse, one of Woodbine's largest community buildings. As dusk approached, people started gathering on the steps of the schoolhouse. Sensing that insurrection was brewing, the schoolteacher, worried about his job, denied the farmers entry to the building. David, never one to tolerate cowardice, entered the building, determined to shame the teacher into dismissing his class. Frustrated by the recalcitrant teacher, David finally grabbed him by the arm and shoved him outside, opening the doors for the meeting participants.

David, not entirely fluent in Yiddish, listened as Jack read from the documents. Soon, cries of "treachery," "bandits," and "betrayers" filled the room. A farmer stood and declared, "The bankers want to get rich on our sweat and tears." The women were vociferous in their denunciation of the Trustees. They shouted, "The bankers promised us cows, and there isn't even a goat to give milk for our babies. We demand cows." After having dedicated the last two years of their lives to building an agricultural community from the heavily forested land, they were outraged that the

assimilated, mostly German-Jewish upper class trustees had not lived up to their end of the bargain.

The next day David learned that the teacher had sent a telegram to the Fund's New York City office accusing David of having threatened to kill him. Professor Sabsovich was distressed that all his hard work might crumble. He was further annoyed that David was one of the ringleaders of the mutiny. Sabsovich walked a fine line: he had day-to-day knowledge of the persistence with which the farmers tackled the many obstacles facing them, yet his employers supported the colony "not as a charitable undertaking, but [one] founded on pure businesslike commercial principles."[36]

David was back on his construction job when he saw four well-dressed men, just off the train from New York, enter the newly finished hotel, followed by Sabsovich and the teacher. David "felt a chill and at the same time a kind of pride at the thought of the importance of [his] act."[37] Assuming that he would be called by the tribunal to tell his side of the story, David put down his hammer and joined the group of farmers who had gathered in front of the hotel. Two hours later the trustees emerged grim-faced, ignoring the farmers' demands for justice.

When David returned to the Sabsovich's home for dinner that evening he sarcastically asked, "Am I convicted to be hanged?" The professor sadly reported, "No, not hanged, but expelled from Woodbine. The trustees do not want any revolutionaries here." David hotly replied, "I don't give a

[36]Ibid., 89.
[37]Ludins, “Memories of Woodbine”, 13.

damn for their verdict. But what I don't like is that the verdict was pronounced behind my back. I have read the U.S. Constitution which guarantees an accused the right to face his accuser. That right the trustees have denied me. As a future citizen of the United States, I protest against this." While David had never intended to emigrate to the U.S., he had quickly absorbed its democratic rhetoric. David remained in the area through the next growing season but decided to return to Russia when local gentiles refused to buy his crop. Nine months after his return, David and Olga celebrated the birth of their first child, Laura. A postcard from Olga to her father reveals that she was thrilled to be the new mother of a daughter, apparently rejecting the traditional notion that boys are favored in Jewish families.

David and Olga lived in Mariupol (Zhdanov), a growing metropolis east of Odessa on the Black Sea. Although the Jewish community in Mariupol was small it supported a number of Zionist and socialist groups, including *Eretz Israel*, a farmers' and workers' support association.[38] Laura was soon joined by four siblings, Ryah (1896), Tima (1898), George (1902), and Eugene (1903). No one remembers how David supported the family but they were relatively well-off and Olga was able to hire someone to help with the housekeeping and childcare. Although the Ludins family prospered economically and socially, anti-Semitic violence was on the rise. In April 1903, forty-nine Jews were killed in a pogrom in Kishniev. Closer to home,

[38] In 1847 there were just over 100 Jews in Mariupol. By 1897 the community numbered 5,000 (or 16 percent of the population) due to immigration from Lithuania and Belorussia. Encyclopedia Judaica, 1007, 54.

tragedy struck the Ludins. Their beloved first-born, Laura, died of an unremembered childhood illness. Within the year, David and Olga decided to move to the United States. Olga's sister and brother, Isidor and Adda, followed in the next year. It was a decision made none too early; two years later, twenty-two Jews were slaughtered by angry mobs in Mariupol.[39]

The transition from Russia to the United States was remarkably smooth for the Ludins. Of course, David had spent several years in Woodbine; they had family already established here, and they had the skills, motivation, and support to make a comfortable life. Opportunities were available and the Ludins took advantage of them. They easily assimilated, although their lives remained embedded in the Jewish community.

In July 1904, the Ludins family disembarked from the first-class section of the *Pretoria* at the pier in Manhattan, bypassing immigrant processing through Ellis Island. By this time, David and Olga knew enough to use the more American-sounding "Ludins" as a surname. Perhaps they went directly to Hartford to stay with David's brother Volodya, who owned a drugstore. Perhaps they stayed with his other brother, Leo, who was also in a financially stable situation. Within a short period of time, however, they relocated to Jennings Street in the Southeast Bronx, an area rapidly filling with Jews who were able to leave the utter squalor of the Lower East Side.

Of this neighborhood, Deborah Dash Moore notes that

> It was the most economically heterogeneous of the immigrant Jewish neighborhoods, and a vigorous secular Jewish life flourished on its streets. The relative luxury of Charlotte Street which ended at

[39]Simon Weisenthal, *Every Day Remembrance Day* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1986), 235.

> Crotona Park stood cheek-by-jowl to the more modest tenements of Wilkins Avenue. The East Bronx acquired a reputation for radicalism. On Washington Avenue the activities of the Yiddish schools, Workmen's Circle clubs, union locals, and socialist meeting halls overshadowed those of the *landsmanshaft chevras* and the [one] Jewish day school. Jewish radical organizations exerted more influence in the neighborhood than religious groups.[40]

Olga maintained the house and cared for the younger children, hiring household help. Soon after they moved a fire broke out on the second floor of the house. Everybody ran outside. As the fire engines raced up someone noticed that George was missing. Panicked, the maid braved the smoke and re-entered the house. As she scrambled up the stairs to the second floor, she spotted George, hiding under a bed. She snatched him and ran. Unfortunately, the house was burned beyond repair.

Laura Lloyd remembers, "They all learned English right away. My grandmother spoke accented English but no problem, she had the vocabulary. They did not grow up speaking Yiddish, oh no, it was Russian. As I said, they were Russian intelligentsia. They didn't fool around in Yiddish. That was a low-class thing."[41]

After the fire the Ludins moved to Morris Avenue. Tima and Ryah attended the local elementary school, P.S. 35. David did his best to establish himself as a contractor. Trained as an architect in Russia and with practical skills honed at Woodbine, he was able to take advantage of a huge demand for new housing. While the Irish-dominated construction industry and unions tried to keep Jews from the field, the clamor for new housing, especially after WWI, was too great. Compared to today, little capital was

[40]Moore, *At Home in America*, 73-74.
[41]Lloyd, interview.

needed to build apartment houses and by the 1930s Jews represented forty percent of New York builders.[42]

In about 1910 the Ludins moved to tree-lined Charlotte Street, two blocks from Crotona Park. On weekends, the family spent many happy hours in the park. When they could, David and Olga took the children out of the city altogether. They visited farms in upstate New York, an area to which David and Olga eventually relocated. The Ludins family's years in the Bronx were good ones. David was doing well as a contractor, and the Ludins were surrounded by a circle of friends, many of whom were like-minded, Russian or Eastern European, politically sophisticated intellectuals. The Ludins all became naturalized citizens in 1911. Tima and her siblings adjusted to life as teenagers in the United States, dating, going to school, and hanging out on the streets. Tima was lucky: her parents adapted easily to the ways of their new country and welcomed her friends into the house.

Marie Syrkin, daughter of socialist Zionist theoretician and philosopher Nachman Syrkin, emigrated to the United States in 1907 and landed on Charlotte Street. While held in high esteem in the community, her father’s intellectual and political activities produced very little income. After a time, Tima and Ryah befriended the youngster. Marie spent many hours in the Ludins’ warm kitchen after her mother was sent to the Denver Jewish Hospital for Consumptives and her father continued his busy schedule of meetings. Marie and Tima would remain lifelong friends.

---

[42]Moore, *At Home in America,* 43.

There was no question that Tima would attend high school; she enrolled at Morris High and did well in her course of studies there. She graduated in 1916 and matriculated as a student at Hunter College. "She went to Hunter. Ryah and Gene went to art school and George went to Cornell. They were of the Jews who thought that education was the basic part of life."[43] She could have attended a two-year teacher training school but the Ludins took a larger view of education as a life-enriching experience, so Tima went to a four-year college.

[43] Lloyd, interview.

George, Tima, Eugene, Olga, Ryah Ludins, 1903 1

Eugene, Ryah, Olga, George, Tima Ludins, 1913 1

CHAPTER TWO

TIMA FINDS HER CALLING: TEACHING

If David and Olga had come of age at a time of expanding opportunities for some Russian Jews, Tima entered the teaching profession at a similarly pivotal point in the development of New York City's educational system. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, democratic capitalism created particular social, political, and economic needs that required changes in the educational system. The size and demographics of the student body changed radically, provoking a similar transformation of the teaching force. The organizational structure of cities and public services grew and evolved and new curriculum content was needed. Alongside of these changes, the initial impetus for unionization of teachers began. It was a movement that did not legally represent teachers for fifty years, but it had a tremendous impact on the politics of education nonetheless. These developments in public education had a particular effect on the city's Jews and shaped the face of public education for the next half century.

Tima and a number of her high-school classmates joined other "subway scholars" in their commute from the Bronx to Manhattan's Hunter College on the eve of the United States entry into World War I. Hunter College was a key institution in the secular life of New York City’s Jews. Hunter provided women –including large numbers of Jewish women-- with access to higher education and therefore an economic role in the middle class that was as vital as men's contribution to upward mobility. The

Hunter alumnae list reads like a “Who's Who of Notable Jewish American Women.” The four years that Tima spent there supported and refined her goals in life.[44]

While much has been made of the role that City College played in opening up economic opportunities for Jewish men, relatively little attention has been paid to Hunter. Hunter College was founded in 1870 as the Normal College of the City of New York to train female teachers. As a normal school, it offered a three-year degree in education. Within a decade of its founding, a four-year, liberal arts curriculum was established. Two years before Tima matriculated, the college changed its name to Hunter to honor its founding president. In 1926, the college affiliated with City College (which did not admit women to its core degree granting program until 1950). By the 1930s, Hunter was the largest women's college in the United States.

In New York, individuals needed a college degree to qualify for certification as a high school teacher. Until 1930, when coeducational Brooklyn College was founded, women who wanted to teach high school went to Hunter. Female New Yorkers from working-class families who wanted to attend college, regardless of their career aspirations, enrolled at Hunter, and most, because of limited professional job opportunities, became teachers. Cornell University, New York’s land grant institution, had started enrolling women in 1870 but it was many hours away upstate. George, Tima’s brother, earned a veterinary degree at Cornell.

---

[44] Markowitz, *My Daughter the Teacher*, provides an account of Hunter College. Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor*, addresses it peripherally.

By the time Tima enrolled at Hunter, tension had emerged between the primarily Northern European-American faculty and administration and the largely immigrant Jewish student body. Ruth Jacknow Markowitz, in her study of Jewish New York City teachers, notes that students attending Hunter

> were in school not merely to train as teachers, but to learn, which in the classroom translated into eagerly raising their hands to answer questions and just as enthusiastically to question, not blindly accepting what they were taught as the ultimate wisdom handed down by their professors. This was behavior not normally seen before, as they 'unknowingly... violated taboos against showy scholarship.'
>
> Often exposed at home to ideas not within the mainstream of American society and unrestrained in their thinking by their family and community, they possessed open minds and critical attitudes toward just about everything they encountered, both in and out of the classroom.
>
> Yet to many faculty members and most of the colleges' administration, it was not the studiousness, skepticism, and noncompliance that vexed them the most, but rather the fact that they perceived these Jewish students as being uncultured, clamorous, and rude; totally at odds with their accepted notion that college students always had been and should continue to be cultivated and refined.[45]

Tima may or may not have viewed her Jewishness as a strong identity. She certainly would not have denied being Jewish. Rather, she may have thought, “what’s the big deal?” or “who cares?” Perhaps she viewed class as more relevant. Regardless of her self-identification, Tima shared with other Hunter students a background that was similar because of her Jewishness. However, Tima was in the minority among Jewish immigrants, having been raised in a decidedly secular, economically comfortable home. Undoubtedly, Hunter provided fertile ground for Tima's ability critically to assess and address issues of the day.

[45]Markowitz, *My Daughter, the Teacher*, 35-36.

While school administrators did not explicitly collect data on religion or ethnicity, some historians assert that Jewish women comprised eighty percent to ninety percent of the students attending Hunter in the 1930s.[46] From a list of women who graduated with Tima in 1920, between thirty percent and forty percent have Jewish-sounding names. These numbers are consistent with the fact that teaching was changing from being a German- and Irish- dominated profession to a Jewish one. In 1910, twenty percent of teachers were Irish, six percent were Jewish. A decade later, twenty-six percent of new teachers were Jewish, by 1930 forty-four percent of entering teachers were Jewish.[47]

Tima majored in English, minored in sociology, and took courses in the emerging discipline of educational pedagogy, art, and other liberal arts. Tima was not one for clubs or sororities --instead she traipsed around Manhattan visiting museums, going to concerts, and attending theatre. During her senior year she taught Americanization to immigrants at an evening school downtown. When she graduated in June 1920, she received honorable mention for the Kelly Silver Medal for Methods of Teaching. Her quote in the yearbook was ironic.

"By day a high-low-brow is she
With her ideals and aims;
By night---away downtown she'll be,
A-teaching foreigners games."

After graduation, Tima took a licensing exam to permit her to teach in the New York City evening schools, where she had already been student

---

[46]Ibid., 21.
[47]Moore, *At Home in America,* 95.

teaching. The examiner asked her what she would do about the multitude of immigrants crowded together in the City's tenements. Tima did not hesitate to answer: "I would remove the causes of discontent by replacing old slum houses with new buildings at low rents, with parks and recreation facilities, with children's playgrounds and with libraries."[48] Despite her radicalism, she received her license.

Soon, she was sent downtown to a school. Meeting with the prim, high-collared principal, she was told to use what appeared to be a hastily improvised curriculum to teach her students "American" ways. In particular, she was to prepare them for their naturalization exams. Every evening she took the subway to school where she taught exhausted factory laborers and teen-aged girls. The most odious part of her job was to supervise a Thursday dance that was, according to the principal, "supposed to get all the students together to overcome the tendency of some immigrants to stick with their own people."[49]

An evening school principal's salary was based on the number of students attending classes. A few weeks after Tima started teaching, the disdainful principal asked her to assume additional duties by making sure that those who had enrolled were attending classes. Tima was delighted to have extra work and a chance to connect in a different way with her Greek, Italian, and Slavic students. With a list of absentees in hand, Tima trudged up tenement steps, ventured into pool parlors, and waited at factory doors. She saw at first hand the challenges facing these newcomers. While she

[48]Tima Tomash, “Americanization” (photocopied short story), Laura Lloyd private collection.
[49]Tima and her family had been naturalized in 1911.

was a first-generation immigrant herself, fifteen years in the United States had removed her from the day-to-day harshness of settling in a new country. Frequently she recommended to the principal ways in which the program could be made more inviting to the students. Most of the time she was rebuffed. Frustrated by her limited role in preparing students for the naturalization exam, she knew that she wanted to open up a wider world for her students, the world of theatre, literature, and history. At the end of the school year, Tima walked out of the evening school determined to find a job in a high school.

In order to be licensed to work in New York City schools, teachers had to pass a rigorous, multifaceted examination given by the Board of Education. First, a teacher had to be a U.S. citizen, show evidence of moral character in the form of a letter from her college dean, and submit her college academic record and supervisor's observations from student teaching. If these were acceptable, the applicant took a highly competitive written examination to demonstrate general intelligence and written language skills, and in the case of high school teachers, competence in a subject area. If the applicant passed the test, she was given an oral exam in the form of a personal interview with the Board of Examiners. Candidates were judged on their deportment, accents, and declarations of loyalty. The process was designed to weed out undesirable role models, particularly those who were unable to mimic Anglo speech patterns and intonations. The applicant then had to pass a physical examination that screened out those with "obvious physical defects such as limb deformities, facial

disfigurations, and deafness. Candidates could not be too short, too fat, or too thin."[50] Having passed these hurdles, the potential teacher was observed by a member of the Board of Examiners while teaching a class. In 1923 Tima started as an English teacher at Evander Childs High School in the Bronx.

Tima graduated from Hunter on the crest of a hiring wave: the school district hired over one thousand teachers for the next academic year. A number of factors contributed to a tremendous expansion of the public education system. First, the City's population was rapidly increasing, in large part because of the influx of immigrants. Many of these immigrants, and particularly Jews, came with families with children. While first-generation immigrant families had to rely on their children for economic help, Progressive Era laws restricting child labor, combined with stricter compulsory elementary education laws passed in 1903, boosted school enrollment. In that year, "a mere 13,000 teachers taught over 600,000 pupils in the city's public schools; by 1925 more than 22,000 teachers instructed approximately 850,000 students."[51]

It was not merely a question, however, of increased numbers of children that propelled the expansion of the public education system. The need for labor had helped attract millions of new immigrants to un- and semi-skilled factory and industrial jobs. But mechanization and expansion of national corporations created a need for a more trained sector of the workforce. Heretofore, the research and development, advertising,

[50]Markowitz, *My Daughter, the Teacher,* 82.
[51]Moore, *At Home in America,* 99.

accounting, and personnel departments of business had been relatively small. An elementary education, adequate for a garment stitcher, was no longer sufficient for an emerging white-collar class. Even clerks and stenographers needed a high school education; the number of commercial and trade courses burgeoned.

A college education quickly became a requirement for those wanting to work as engineers, accountants, or managers. Universities that had previously offered a Christian-based, classical curriculum to the sons of the wealthy now became the training grounds for men entering increasingly complex national corporations. Universities created departments of science, engineering, and commerce. Other new fields, besides education itself, such as social work, anthropology, and psychology, emerged that required post-secondary education. Local school officials were forced to beef up the almost non-existent public secondary school system in order to provide a pool of college-ready people. It was not until 1897 that New York City (then Manhattan and the Bronx) established its first public high school, DeWitt Clinton.[52]

A third element contributed to the increase in size of the educational system. Most of the immigrants arriving at the turn of the century came from southern and eastern Europe, from Catholic and Jewish cultures with customs and languages that were quite different from prevailing Western European, Protestant values. Many of the immigrants, and particularly

---

[52] Several historians address the development of New York City's educational system during the Progressive Era including, Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor*, and Markowitz, *My Daughter, the Teacher*.

Jews, came with well-developed socialist or trade unionist views. Sherry Gorelick argues that "labor militancy and the socialist movement provided an impetus for the creation of systematic linkages, making possible educational career ladders, ladders of mobility through education." [53] The Ludins family did indeed have educational opportunities that channeled them into the arts and professions rather than working-class jobs. If these had not been available, their socialist upbringing might have led Tima and her siblings to militant action as working-class activists.

These radical changes in urban demographics, from a Northern European-American population to one dominated by Jewish, Polish, Italian, and Slavic nationalities, also influenced curriculum content. As early as 1910, almost half of Manhattan's student population was Jewish; [54] the next largest group were the Italians, together far outnumbering native-born and German and Irish immigrants. Just as native-born Republicans feared the strength of immigrant-based Democratic Party bosses, there was a general feeling that immigrants would overwhelm American ways with their clannish, primitive traditions. Writing at the time, historian Edward Cubberly summed up popular, if mistaken, attitudes. "Illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative, and not possessing the Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order and government, their coming had served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civic life." [55] Many people looked to the schools to inculcate the new generation with

---

[53] Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor*, 187.
[54] Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, 3.
[55] Edward Cubberly, *Changing Conception of Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 15 quoted in Stephan Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, 5.

patriotism for their new country, methods of sanitary hygiene and reverence for middle-class values, in short, a program of Americanization.

Americanization, as Tima knew so well, involved stripping immigrants of all distinguishing characteristics, from language to political beliefs. Gorelick points out, "Under the circumstances, the fact that the melting pot was not polyglot is an amazing social fact, a tribute to the ability of a dominant social class to exterminate, via Americanization, the creative potential of a natural learning situation. Civics lessons in the elementary schools were to emphasize American institutions and love of country. [Teachers] were not instructed to teach children appreciation (or knowledge) of the immigrants' 'ways.'"[56] Further, "the use of the schools for the purpose of Americanization and social control infused education at the turn of the century with much of its specific cultural content."[57] It is hardly surprising that the words to the song, "America" were printed at the bottom of the Hunter College graduation program of 1920, the year Tima graduated. Most graduates, who were barely second-generation immigrants, must have known the words to this song that extolled the virtues of native-born, Christian, and civic pride. Perhaps it was printed there for their immigrant parents' benefit; perhaps it was a reminder to the graduates to teach in the "American" way.

By 1900 the German Jewish community was well assimilated, having been in this country for several generations, sharing much in common with German gentiles. Many were active on educational issues. In the early

[56]Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor*, 96.
[57]Ibid., 187.

1880s, Jacob Schiff, a German Jewish industrialist, sat on the New York City Board of Education. By the turn of the century the Board was still dominated by Anglo membership but other wealthy Jewish Republicans, such as Felix Warburg and Morris Loeb, were also appointed. These Jews, by class, held very similar views about the education of immigrant children as their gentile counterparts. They distinguished themselves only on their stand against explicit Christian theology being taught in the schools. Many German Jews in New York City endorsed the sentiments of John Haaren, Associate Superintendent of Schools, when he said, "The school, as one of the instruments of civilization, must take its part in solving the problem that has been precipitated by the great immigration of people who differ from the great mass of our population, not only in language, but in customs, political ideals, and to a considerable extent in religion."[58] Motivated by an interest in protecting their own standing, empathy for their co-religionists, and genuine interest in education, they were instrumental in shaping educational policy.

An incident in the heavily Jewish Brownsville section of Brooklyn illustrates the diversity of ways Jews influenced the educational system. At an assembly in December 1904, Frank Harding, Principal of P.S. 144, exhorted his students to be more Christ-like during the Christmas season. An eighth-grade Jewish girl, Augusta Herbert, objected to his bringing

[58] William Maxwell, "Education of the Immigrant Child" in Education of the Immigrant, abstracts of papers read at a public conference under the auspices of the NY-NJ Committee of the North American Civic League for Immigrants, held at NYC 16 and 17 May 1913 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 51, 1913), 19-20 quoted in Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*,.79.

religion into the school, to which he replied, “Christ loves all but the hypocrites and the hypocrites are those who do not believe in him.”[59] Enraged, the Jewish parents petitioned Local School Board 39 demanding Harding’s dismissal. The Board supported Harding. The Jewish community pursued the matter by appealing to the citywide Board of Education’s Committee on Elementary Schools. This Committee delayed action on the matter for five months before issuing a report that called Harding’s words “indiscrete” and criticized the local school board’s handling of the matter.[60]

Inspired by their bureaucratic victory, some Jews continued to press the Board of Education to curtail mostly Anglo- and German-American teachers and principals from Christian proselytizing in predominantly Jewish schools. While allegiance to God and country was a pedagogical foundation on which the schools were built, the Jewish community was particularly enraged at the explicit Christian theology that appeared each Christmas time. There were, however, divisions within the Jewish community based on class and background. A. Stern (who may very well have been a German Jew) was Chairman of the Elementary School Committee of the Board of Education. In response to pressure to ban Christmas celebrations, the Board refused and Stern stated, “these agitators have not the support of the more intelligent Jews of this city.”[61] It appears as though he was trying to distinguish himself and his social group

[59] Leonard Bloom, “A Successful Jewish Boycott of the New York City Public Schools, Christmas 1906,” *American Jewish History* 70:2 (December 1980): 182.
[60] Ibid., 184.
[61] Ibid., 185.

from Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews who were not only uneducated but also politically suspect.

In December 1906, two of the three Yiddish newspapers ran front-page stories calling for a boycott of schools on the day of the Christmas assembly. The *New York Times* reported that one-third of Lower East Side children stayed home that day. Stern was quoted as saying, "In the Kindergartens, the children danced around Christmas trees. I could see nothing objectionable in this for I have no objection to Christmas trees, holly, mistletoe and similar decorations."[62] Stern, if indeed he was a German Jew, accepted the celebration of Christmas as an American custom, a not uncommon practice in well-to-do German Jewish homes. Nonetheless, the clout of the immigrant Jewish community had been felt by the Board's Elementary School Committee which issued orders that "the singing of hymns be forbidden, that reading from any distinctive religious treatise or book, other than the Bible, be forbidden . . . and that the City Superintendent of Schools issue a circular letter annually cautioning the principals and teaching staff in this respect (elimination of religious content in pre-winter vacation exercises)."[63] The Committee added that the district's past practices were 'unobjectionable' and it specifically excluded the Christmas tree and the Lord's Prayer from its prohibitions.

Between 1898 and 1914 New York City's school enrollment doubled, from less than 400,000 to over 800,000.[64] The school district's

---

[62]Ibid., 186-7.
[63]Ibid., 188.
[64]Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, 3.

administrative structure evolved to meet the exigencies of a larger system. Changing student body demographics and Progressive Era politics influenced this new growth. Following a national trend, reformers pushed for centralization of authority. Just as they had spearheaded campaigns to weed out corruption in local politics, Republican reformers, enlisting the help of women's clubs, endorsed legislation to centralize school authority. In 1896 their efforts resulted in the formation of a citywide New York City Board of Education to exert some control over local, neighborhood-based school boards.

As individual schools overflowed with students and secondary schools were built to expand the trained labor force, school districts themselves merged. In 1898 Brooklyn was incorporated into the renamed City of Greater New York. Its school system joined that of Manhattan and the Bronx. According to Gorelick, "Centralization was a successful attempt by big business white Protestant Progressive Republicans to wrest control of the public schools from local ethnic communities, from Democratic politicians, and from local, primarily ethnic, businessmen."[65]

In 1901, centralized power was reinforced by a charter revision. One component of the charter was the establishment of a forty-six person Board of Education, a city superintendent and eight deputy superintendents. The hierarchy of school districts that still exists was formed. The Board standardized curriculum, the length of the school day, and created professional standards. Organizationally, the school district was becoming

[65]Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor*, 75.

remarkably similar to the growing corporations. The theory of scientific management, which was in vogue, was applied to schools. Efficiency, standardization, and professionalism were introduced into public education. Gorelick asserts that the emerging organizational structure "lessened teachers' control over their work, lowered their salaries, and reduced even principals to closely managed employees. In effect, teachers and lower-level administrators were simultaneously professionalized and semi-proletarianized. In response they began to unionize."[66]

The proliferation of district bureaucracy notwithstanding, within each school, the principal prevailed. Teachers had little say in decision-making. In 1912, a New York City school teacher, Dr. Henry Linville, started a new magazine, *American Teacher*. Dedicated to "Democracy in Education; Education for Democracy," the magazine served as a forum for Linville's condemnation of school administrators' paternalistic and authoritarian stances as well as such issues as better salaries, maternity leaves, and tenure. In its second year of publication, *American Teacher* issued a call to organize. The call bears quoting at length because it epitomizes the core philosophy of what was to become the New York City Teachers Union. The undersigned wanted to create

> an organization which shall have for its objectives improved working conditions for teachers and better educational results for children.
>
> On the ground that teachers do the every-day work of teaching, and understand the conditions necessary for better teaching, we propose the following principles for the new organization:

[66] Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor*, 97.

> Teachers should have a voice and a vote in the determination of educational policies.
>
> Teachers may justly claim the right to seats in the Board of Education . . .
>
> The right to seats in the controlling body should carry with it the right to vote . . .
>
> The granting of legislative opportunity to the teachers would inevitably contribute to the development of a strong professional spirit, and the intelligent use of their experience in the interest of the public.
>
> We advocate the adoption of a plan that will permit all the teachers to have a share in the administration of the affairs of their own schools. In no more practical way could teachers prepare themselves for training children for citizenship in a democracy.
>
> We urge the scientific study of educational experience, to the end that the lessons of past successes and failures in education may be known to all.
>
> There is evidence that the public schools are being freed from the domination of party politics . . .
>
> Among the most important of these unfavorable conditions [that affect each teacher] are, the size of classes, the unhygenic conditions of many schools, the excess of clerical labor, the salaries and ratings of teachers, and the lack of opportunity for professional improvement during tenure of office.[67]

The call resulted in the formation of the Teachers League. Three years later the Teachers League decided that it could most effectively achieve its goals by forming an actual union to work "for proper conditions, proper salaries, for a share in the control of the schools, for a voice in the formation of school policy."[68] These teachers saw an intrinsic link between professional freedom and economic status. While some teachers refused to

---

[67] "A Call to Organize," *American Teacher*, February 1913, 27 as quoted in Eaton, *The American Federation of Teachers*, 13-14.
[68] Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union,* 17.

associate themselves with the labor movement their options for activism were limited. The National Educational Association was dominated by school administrators and college presidents and did not, at the time, provide support for classroom teachers. Within a few months, in May 1916, eight small locals from around the country formed the American Federation of Teachers and affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. The Teachers Union of the City of New York received a charter as Local 5 of the new national union. Henry Linville was the first president of Local 5. Tima had just matriculated at Hunter.

On the one hand, turning to unions to improve working conditions was not an odd choice for New York City teachers. The labor movement, ranging from the conservative, highly skilled AFL unions to the radical IWW-oriented affiliations, was directly challenging management in the twentieth century's first decades. In 1909 thousands of Lawrence mill workers struck for months; that year and the next shirtwaist makers took to the streets of New York to protest, with help from middle-class women's groups. It would have been natural for teachers who were associated with the Socialist Party or the suffrage movement to turn to unionization. Some of their parents or cousins may have been labor activists in factories. On the other hand, how many teachers, while underpaid, viewed the solution to their problems as being the same as that of poor, factory workers? Clearly, the answer was not very many. Six hundred of New York City's 20,000 teachers joined the new Teachers Union, Local 5. The union remained a

tiny minority of teachers until the 1960s, yet it exerted leadership in educational reform vastly out of proportion to its size.

While primarily concerned with economic issues, Local 5 from the beginning saw itself as part of a broader social and political movement. A year after its founding, Local 5 was already embroiled in political controversy stemming from teachers' opposition to the United States entry into World War I. From the beginning, Local 5 was vociferous in its defense of academic freedom. Linville believed that the union was responsible for protecting teachers who were "afraid to criticize the existing order, afraid to suggest reforms." World War I provided the union with ample opportunity to do this. Not until 1917, when the United States was about to enter World War I did the Teachers Union, many of whose members were pacifists or socialists, finally support intervention. However, they remained critical of the hyper-nationalism and militarism that was being promoted in the schools.[69]

In 1917 the New York state legislature passed its first loyalty law that called for the dismissal of teachers for seditious words or acts. The New York City Board of Education soon followed suit and further established a mechanism for monitoring whether teachers were teaching patriotic values in the classroom. The union aggressively defended three union members who were dismissed for their political beliefs or for criticizing the administration. The union was well aware that the three male high school teachers were Jewish and Socialist Party members. The ultra-patriotism of

[69] For more about the early years of the union see Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union* and Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*.

the time gave the Board of Education a legitimate avenue for questioning the Union's existence.

In 1919, the New York state legislature established a Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities (the Lusk Committee). It focused on the Teachers Union and Americanization efforts. The Committee reinforced the public's perception that immigrants were potentially subversive to the system. By 1920, sixty percent of the students in New York City high schools were children of immigrants. Dr. Tildsley, Superintendent of the New York City high schools, testified to the Committee that these children had to be Americanized because "they were exposed to ideas opposed to the present economic, social and political order."[70] The Lusk report finally pronounced, "In entering the public school system the teacher assumes certain obligations and must of necessity surrender some of his intellectual freedom. If he does not approve of the present social system or the structure of our government he is at liberty to entertain these ideas, but must surrender this public office."[71]

The Committee recommended and the legislature passed a bill requiring *state* certification of teachers. Certification required "the teacher holding the same is a person of good moral character and that he has shown satisfactorily that he is loyal and obedient to the government of this state and of the United States; no such certificate shall be issued to any person, who, while a citizen of the United States, has advocated, by word of mouth or in writing, a change in the form of government of the United States or of

[70]Ibid., 172.
[71]Ibid., 172.

this state by force, violence or unlawful means."[72] At the same time, the New York City Teachers Council, a conservative professional group, finished its report on the union and submitted it to the Board of Education. It said, in part, "the State would be justified in punishing by dismissal from service any person who, while holding a position in the public schools, persists in remaining or becoming a member of this un-American organization [Teachers Union]."[73] The Teachers Union was vocal in its opposition to this redbaiting, union-busting rhetoric. While Governor Alfred Smith repealed the Lusk Laws in 1923, the stage had been set for the state to take an active role in monitoring and restricting teachers' political activity, a role that it would resume in the future.

The Teachers Union persisted in its efforts to improve working conditions while it vigorously defended teachers' civil liberties. But membership remained low; most teachers did not identify with the labor movement and saw themselves as professionals. Many schools had no members; some had only two or three, making open union activity difficult. Only a very few schools had a critical mass of union members.

When Tima walked into her classroom filled with thirty-five children that fall of 1923, she knew that she was in the right place. Looking expectantly at her was a group of primarily second-generation Jewish- and Italian-Americans. Most of them were the first in their families to go to high school. Many were bright and understood that they were their families'

[72]Ibid., 173.
[73]Ibid., 175.

hopes of moving into the middle class. Tima felt at home here and plunged happily into her life's work, teaching.

Most of the other teachers at Evander Childs were older men. Tima was one of a new breed of teachers. She had studied educational pedagogy and had many ideas about how to teach. It was soon apparent that there was a split in the school between teachers who espoused "progressive education, who were reaching out for new ideals, goals, methods of teaching; and the 'old guard,' who was waging a battle against poor spelling, grammar, punctuation."[74] Tima was anxious to instill her love of learning in her students. Despite this gender and age gap, Tima found support as a new teacher. In particular, Mr. Raubichek "encouraged and helped me to give my teaching the best of my creativity."[75]

Not content to teach solely from the textbooks, Tima turned to newspapers to teach her charges critical thinking. She told them to bring newspaper articles to the class to discuss together. She did not stand in front of the class and lecture. She wanted the children to be active participants in their education. While she did not hide her progressive views from the teens she encouraged them to analyze issues and come to their own conclusions. She exhorted them to take advantage of the City's cultural opportunities and read as much as they could.

Amy Swerdlow, an author and peace activist, graduated from Evander Childs in 1939. She recalls that Tima was "an inspirational, progressive,

---

[74]Tima Ludins, "The Rejuvenation of Mr. Quimby" (photocopied story), Laura Lloyd private collection.

[75] Tima Ludins Tomash to Raubichek, Santa Monica, CA, 10 January 1964, Laura Lloyd private collection.

committed, demanding, dedicated, and memorable teacher. I think it was a special honors English class that she taught, but I am not sure, nor do I remember what we studied. I knew that she was a union member, and a supporter of the American Student Union in which I was active, but I don't think I knew that she was a communist. People were not very open about that."[76]

Tima also enthusiastically threw herself into working with the other staff and administrators. Despite her outspoken nature, she worked hard and got along well with others. Two activities from later in her career indicate the extent to which she was a team player. In 1937, Hymen Alpern, principal at Evander Child wrote Tima a note. "Miss Vermilya tells me that a number of teachers indicated on their questionnaires a preference for the "Ludins Plan" of personality training. May I therefore invite you to become a member of the Personality Committee so that your plan can be incorporated in the final set-up."[77] Even in 1952, after she had been teaching for twenty-nine years she showed few signs of burnout. Alpern sent her a memo stating, "I have just had a chance to examine rather carefully the new issue of the Evander Handbook. My impression without reservation is a most favorable one. Please accept a very hearty thanks for producing one of the most attractive and informative publications we have

[76]E-mail to author, 27 June 1996. Swerdlow reconnected with Tima again in Women Strike for Peace in the 1960s. Swerdlow's e-mail continues, "By then she seemed like a doctrinaire ideologue to me. We never worked on any committees together, so I know little of her WSP activities but she is mentioned frequently in the LA WSP newspaper."
[77] Hymen Alpern to Tima Ludins, memo, 23 February 1937, Laura Lloyd private collection.

ever been able to offer." The memo was stamped with "A copy of this note has been filed in your official folder." [78]

While Tima was busy at school during the week, her evenings and weekends were filled with outings with friends and family. Snapshots show her celebrating May Day 1923 up on the roof of the Charlotte Street building with her mother, Olga; posing at Far Rockaway beach in 1924; lounging at Long Beach (photo taken by pal Emil Feldberg); horsing around with a group of boys; with Olga in Woodstock, New York; sitting by a brook in the country thinking pensively; and in the woods (perhaps in Ithaca) with her brother George and some of his friends.

While devoted to her family, Tima decided to move out of Charlotte Street and get her own apartment. She found one nearby on West 166th Street. At the time this was somewhat unusual but Tima had been taught by her parents not to live by others' rules or expectations. By this time Ryah had pursued her interests by attending the Art Students' League and obtaining a degree in art from Teacher's College. George had headed off to Cornell University to work on a degree in veterinary science. And Eugene, in his determination to be a professional baseball player, was playing on an upstate New York farm team.

The Ludins welcomed Laura, daughter of George and his wife, Sylvia, into the world in 1924. George opened a veterinary practice in Hartford, Connecticut. A year later, Ryah went to Europe with friends. She visited Paris with Rob McKenzie, Peter Linzbach, and Dorothy and Fred Knight.

---

[78]Hymen Alpern to Tima Ludins, memo, 9 September 1952, Laura Lloyd private collection.

She found Lake Geneva in Switzerland to be romantic and sat for hours with her friend, Nina, in Belgian cafes. Ryah was enthralled with the magnificent frescoes of Giotto and Michelangelo in Italy. She returned to New York full of enthusiasm, her art inspired by her new experiences. The next summer, Tima and Ryah sailed from New York on the *SS Orizaba* to tour Europe. They climbed in the Swiss Alps with friends and visited Sorrento. At the end of their sojourn, Ryah decided to stay to study art in Paris and Italy. Tima returned to teaching at Evander Childs.

Tima Ludins 1

Hunter College Yearbook, 1920 1

George and Ryah on Charlotte St. roof 1

Tima and Olga on Charlotte St roof, May Day, 1923 1

CHAPTER THREE

CHANNELING PASSION: THE UNION AND THE PARTY

Tima was delighted to be back in the classroom. While she missed Ryah, she threw herself into the task of educating her students. She didn't mind having to punch a time clock upon arriving at school, nor did it bother her much to have to complete the ever-increasing paperwork required by the Board of Education, for when she entered the classroom she was in charge. Encouraging, coaxing and prodding the children to think, analyze and be creative, she was efficient, orderly, and demanding in her expectations.

While Tima was honing her skills as a teacher in the classroom, the Teachers Union staff was concentrating its efforts on lobbying the State Legislature on reform measures and against budget cuts. Dr. Abraham Lefkowitz, the union's legislative representative, working with the State Federation of Labor, pressed the legislature to adopt a new formula for state aid to education that would ensure a minimum level of support for localities. In 1927 they won increases to the state's teachers' salary schedule. Tima had started off making $1900 a year; in 1928 a starting teacher was entitled to $2148.

The initial impulse for starting the union had come from politically active people with progressive social and economic views. Almost from the start, this high level of political engagement bred divisions within the Union. The major split was between the liberals and those who were more

influenced by the ideals of the Communist Party, the radicals. The disputants were all left of center. In 1925, just nine years after its founding, a group of twenty-eight union members wrote an open letter alleging that

> The policies and achievements of the Teachers Union are now menaced by a few members of the Executive Board who are sympathizers with the Workers' Party (Communist). These members . . . have used disruptive and vituperative tactics . . . to pervert it for purposes alien to the ideals of the Union and the American Labor movement.

In closing the letter said

> For many months this troublesome group has taken advantage of every available parliamentary device in the meetings of the Executive Board and in some general meetings of the Union to further its own political projects, with the result that necessary business is rarely completed, while the patience of our members is becoming exhausted. Invited speakers at our meetings have been insulted, and moderate members have stayed away rather than endure the waste of time and the vituperation for which this group is responsible.[79]

As the Depression deepened, younger union members urged the union to take a more militant stance in response to layoffs, the use of long-term substitutes to evade full-time hires, and increased class size. Eventually, these members coalesced into two opposition factions, the CP-aligned "Rank and File" and the Socialist and ex-CP Lovestoneite-oriented "Progressive" groups. The centrists, headed by Lefkowitz and Linville, were known as the "Administration." The opposition was adamant in their criticism of both the Board of Education and the Union. They wanted

[79]As quoted in a Teachers Union memorandum to the Executive Board, 30 September 1932, 1-2. Teachers Union of the City of New York Collection, Labor Management Documents Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

unappointed (substitutes) or unemployed teachers to have full voting rights in the Union with reduced union fees, a union drive, and mass action in the community. Both factions started signing up members and union membership rose to 2,000 for the first time.[80]

By 1932 union meetings were genuinely raucous affairs. Fully exasperated, the Union's leadership appointed a special committee to review the activities of "left-wing members." In September the committee issued its report with a recommendation to expel twelve union members. The committee alleged that these members' conduct and tactics

> indicate the undoubted acceptance of the organized and directed discipline of the Communist movement in America. . . . The Communist policy requires the carrying out of a policy of creating dissension in all kinds of organizations, conservative and radical alike, and justifies any method of attack against the leadership of organizations, through the publication of false charges against officers, and through every kind of activity that tends toward the ultimate disruption that may prepare the way for their program of seizing power.

However, the report continued,

> it is not our desire to attempt to show that anyone who is now a member of the Teachers Union is a member of the Communist Party. Neither is it our desire to deny to any member of the Union the right to join that party or to believe in its principles. Our purpose is to show that anyone who by his conduct in the meetings of the Teachers Union indicates that he has accepted a theory of outside party discipline which implies disruption of a trade union, is unfit for membership in the Teachers Union."[81]

---

[80]Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union*, 25.

[81]Teachers Union memorandum to the Executive Board, 30 September 1932, 3-4. Teachers Union of the City of New York Collection, Labor Management Documents Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

The recommendation, which was eventually watered down to a six-month suspension of five members, failed to get the needed two-thirds vote at a large and boisterous general membership meeting.

In the spring of 1933, Isidore Blumberg, head of The Teachers' Committee to Protect Salaries, was dismissed from his teaching position for publicly protesting wage cuts. When the union gave him only lukewarm support, his supporters formed the Blumberg Defense Committee. Two Committee members, Mrs. Williana Burroughs, one of only a few Black teachers in the system, and Isidore Begun, an organizer of the Unemployed Teachers Association and a leader in Rank and File, asked to be heard at a Board of Education meeting. Not only did the Board refuse, they ordered the police to clear the room of protesters. Front-page headlines the next day read, "Police Rout 300 at Meeting of School Board."[82] Both Burroughs and Begun were dismissed as a result of their protest. The Union did not support these teachers; in fact, Burroughs and Begun were two of the twelve members that the Union had tried to expel the previous fall.

Tima, however, missed out on all of this upheaval. The summer after the 1931-32 school year she had taken off for a year of travel, study, and work in Europe and the Soviet Union. She went with a group organized by Intourist, and wound her way through Germany, England, France, Italy, and Russia. She wandered through museums marveling at the art, and sat in cafes watching people. She taught English at a Soviet university. Tima was interested in the Soviet Union's program to eradicate illiteracy, its

[82]Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union*, 178.

experimental teaching, and its intent to educate from the cradle to the grave.

In May 1933 she wrote a letter from Moscow to the principal at Evander Childs High School, Henry Norr:

> My big year is about to come to an end. It has flown by so quickly that I can hardly realize its passing. This year has been an extraordinarily rich experience for me.
>
> First I traveled in Europe to places where I had never been before; then in the Soviet Union--in the Caucasus Crimea on the Black Sea.[83] I feel that I have been particularly fortunate in being here at this period when Russia is building a new world--always a stimulating process--but especially here where they had to begin from the very foundations in many respects. The enthusiasm with which they have seized upon the work and their complete faith in the soundness of the structure has carried them through in spite of the most unbelievable difficulties. Everybody is studying to prepare for the tremendous demands being made here on man's abilities, and training. The number of engineering schools, factory schools, music schools, and schools in every possible special field, is overwhelming. No one who knew the proverbially lazy worker of Czarist times, could believe that these are the same people.
>
> I expect to leave Moscow soon, and do a bit of traveling, perhaps in Asia. Traveling is a bad business. Wherever one goes, one hears of a place just a few hundred miles away which one 'simply must see.' One goes on to see it, and by the end of his journey, finds himself hundreds of miles away from his originally planned line of march. But by this method I have often stumbled upon the most fascinating places. I shall probably always be just such an incurably unchastened traveler. Nevertheless, I shall get back in time. The end of my year's leave will find me back in Evander on the opening day of the fall term. It will be pleasant to be among my old friends again, of whom I have often thought during my absence.
>
> I hope this has been a very successful school year, and that the vacation following it will be a very pleasant one for you. My kindest regards to your family, and to your 'Evander family.'[84]

---

[83]It is unknown whether Tima had the opportunity to visit her birthplace in Russia.
[84]Tima Ludins to Henry Norr, 30 May 1933, Laura Lloyd private collection.

When Tima returned to Evander Childs in the fall of 1933 she was thoroughly invigorated. Her usual zeal for teaching had been magnified by her trip abroad. As was typical for every teacher who'd been on leave, Tima gave a one-hour talk at a staff meeting about her year away. Her speech was on education in the Soviet Union. She eagerly reported on the number of schools they were building and on the office buildings the Soviets were converting into schools. Her enthusiasm was unbridled; she never hesitated to report about "the treatment of prisoners whom they kept in this one place that I visited, some little village place, Prisoner Village, they called it. I was impressed with the fact that the children--that mothers who worked could leave their children."[85]

No one knows whether Tima was a member of the Communist Party when she visited the Soviet Union. Clearly, her family and friends must have been overjoyed when the revolution triumphed. The Czarist system had been nothing but trouble for both the Jews and workers in general. In the succeeding fifteen years, as Communism developed there and economic conditions in the United States worsened, the Party's solutions undoubtedly seemed attractive. It is possible that Tima joined the Party in the 1920s. Maybe she was a member of a Socialist youth organization while at Hunter. But since she had been to Europe in 1926 and had not visited the Soviet Union it seems unlikely that she was a member then. Perhaps she joined

[85] U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary. *Hearings on Subversive Influence in the Educational Process*. 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 10, 24 February and 3 March 1953, 499.

after the Stock Market Crash in 1929. If that was the case, her trip in 1932 would have been a culminating experience, a chance to see for herself what she'd been working for here. But if she had been a member prior to her trip why didn't she join the Teachers Union until November of 1933?

In any case, November 1933 marks the point when three essential parts of her life came together: her teaching, her political involvement, and her union activity. In these, she was able to channel her passion for life; her involvement here was the vehicle for her tremendous creativity, determination, and idealism. Her teaching gave her authority and a chance to see change on an individual level. Her union work gave her an opportunity to work with others for reform at the city and state levels. And her involvement in the Party gave her an overarching reason for everything else. There was a synergy between these three parts of her life.

Vivian Gornick has written most eloquently about her parents' involvement in the Communist Party. "When these people sat down at the kitchen table to talk, Politics sat down with them, Ideas sat down with them, above all, History sat down with them."[86] For Tima, too, her involvement in the Party elevated her experience from the mundane to the exalted. Gornick reminds us that people's allegiance to the Party was not just a political calculation. There was a spiritual, emotional, and a romantic plane of Party membership. Gornick continues,

> There are, it seems to me, a number of stable hungers in the human psyche, each one capable of flaring into passion once brought to expressive life. One of these hungers, beyond question, is the need to live a life of meaning. The motive force

[86]Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism*, 7.

> is the dread fear that life is *without* meaning. This fear-hunger speaks to a need not of the flesh but of the spirit, a need having to do with the deepest definitions of what it is to be human. As with other human needs, it is possible to live an entire lifetime without encountering the people, ideas, or events which will trigger into conscious life this primeval hunger. But once met . . .[87]

Her words describe the role that the Party played in Tima's life. Gornick, writing four decades later still recalls vividly the compelling force behind Party membership.

> What I remember most deeply about the Communists is their passion. It was a passion that converted them, passion that held them, passion that lifted them up and then twisted them down. Each and every one of them experienced a kind of inner radiance: some intensity of illumination that tore at the soul.
>
> Nothing in the twentieth century has spoken as compellingly--with such power and moral imagination--to this need as has Communism; nothing in modern times has so joined the need with the real and the ideal to produce a universe of internal experience as has Communism; nothing has so induced in men and women all over the world a commonly held dream of passionate proportion.[88]

The Party was a mechanism for Tima to channel her intellect, passion, libido, and spirituality.

Because of Tima's involvement in the Party, it is no surprise that she threw herself into union activity. She supported the Rank and File's strategy for building the Union. Not only was it the Party-inspired position, it was very concrete and action-oriented. During her early years in the union, most of her work was centered on being the School Representative from Evander Childs. She methodically surveyed the other teachers there

---

[87]Ibid., 14.
[88]Ibid., 13.

to determine whether any were potential union members. She tried to involve those whom she judged were most receptive. She kept abreast of issues involving teachers by reading the District's School Page and the city newspapers. In the lunchroom and at staff meetings she raised these matters for group discussion and action. She distributed the Union's newspaper, *Teacher News*, in teachers' mailboxes and circulated petitions for full sick pay and against alertness courses. Tima attended monthly membership meetings, School Representative meetings, and of course, Rank and File meetings.

One of Tima's colleagues, Stella Eliashow had emigrated from England with her mother, went to Hunter College and started her student teaching in 1925. She held a variety of substitute jobs, mostly at Washington Irving High School, until 1929 when she was appointed to a permanent position at Theodore Roosevelt High School. Perhaps she was one of the lucky few to get such a position that year. In February 1934 Stella Eliashow joined Tima Ludins on the Evander Childs High School teaching staff. They taught at the same school for five years until Stella was transferred to a newly opened school, Christopher Columbus High.

Stella had joined the union in 1932, a year before Tima. There they both were, two single Jewish women teaching at Evander and active union members. It is quite probable that Stella was in the Party as well. If she wasn't then she was certainly sympathetic to their ideals. We know that Tima and Stella were close but we really know nothing about the quality of their relationship. Did they gossip about their love lives? Or did they keep

their relationship on a more political or collegial level? Both were single. Did they date men? While Tima was in her twenties she seemed to socialize with groups of people, mainly men. Some of her later short stories tell about roaming museums with alluring men. Was this wistful storytelling or did it reflect her actual experience? During the period she taught at Evander with Stella, Tima was in her early thirties, a time when most women were married and with children. Did Tima yearn for that life? Perhaps at some level she did. More likely, she adjusted her life expectations and was thankful that she had her teaching, the Union, and the Party.

While at Evander, teachers were evaluated yearly. From four evaluations done between 1934 and 1938, we can glimpse at Stella's teaching style and the mind set of the evaluator. From everything we know, it is likely that Tima's would have been similar. Stella was well regarded as a teacher by her evaluators. Dudley Miles, in October 1934, commended her for a "successful treatment of the problems of composition. The emphasis which you placed upon subject matter was entirely wholesome. The interest which you yourself displayed in the pictures of their neighbors presented in their themes by the students would naturally stimulate these young writers to their best efforts."[89] Stella wanted to engage her students in the mechanics of writing by having them write about topics relevant to their lives. She validated their day-to-day experiences by encouraging them

[89]Dudley Miles to Stella Eliashow, 23 October 1934, Teachers Union of the City of New York Collection, Labor Management Documents Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

to view their working-class and poor neighborhoods as subject matter for an essay.

Stella also chose to teach from books that reflected working-class life such as *Jews Without Money* by Michael Gold and *The Plough and the Stars* by Sean O'Casey. She tried to place these books and other subjects in both a personal and political context. Mr. Miles commented in 1938, "The discussion of Paul Robeson showed a care to stimulate the individual reactions of the students to their own experiences. They, for example, had to discuss the rule that forbids a boy to play football if he doesn't pass in his work. It likewise trained them to look for relationships of their reading with wider matters, such as the light that might be thrown by Paul Robeson's life on the position of the Negro in the United States. The discussion will doubtless lead a few of the more alert pupils to further investigation."[90]

Between 1935 and 1940, when Tima and Stella were teaching, organizing, and going to Party meetings, Local 5 was embroiled at the local and national levels with dissension and rancor. These conflicts were ideological and often split along generational lines. In 1935 the Union leadership unsuccessfully called on the AFT to investigate the opposition, with a goal of getting Local 5's charter revoked so a new local without opposition could be formed. In response, eight hundred of the Teacher's Union's 2200 members split off from the AFT and formed the Teachers Guild. With the most conservative members gone, Local 5 reinstated the monthly membership meeting "as the highest policy-making body of the

[90]Dudley Miles to Stella Eliashow, 30 December 1938, Teachers Union of the City of New York Collection, Labor Management Documents Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

organization."[91] Membership started to grow. By the end of the year it had grown 200 percent.

At the next AFT convention AFL President William Green himself called for expulsion of Local 5 but delegates rejected his plea. In 1938 the Teachers' Union divided itself into two sections, one part became Local 537, which was the College Teachers' Union, and the other part remained Local 5, which was the Union for High School and Elementary School Teachers. By 1939 there were 6500 elementary and high school teachers in the Teacher's Union.[92]

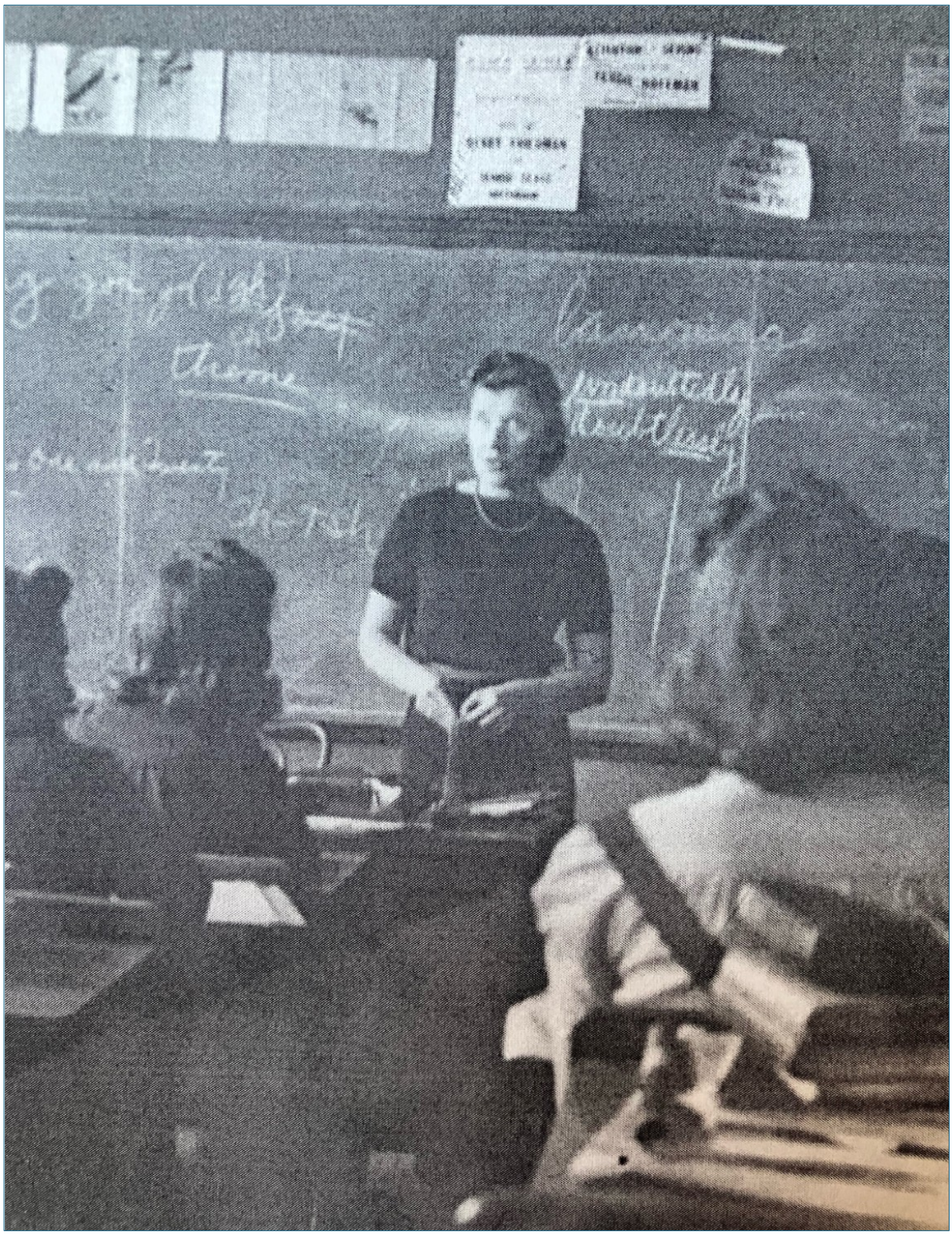
In 1938 the New York City AFL Central Trades and Labor Council suspended Local 5, when the latter called for unity between the AFL and the CIO. Despite the suspension, the AFL State Federation of Labor cooperated with the New York State Federation of Teachers, a group organized and led by Local 5. That year legislative inquiries into left-wing political activities at the state and federal level were instigated (Rapp-Coudert and Dies Committees).

On the eve of the 1939 AFT convention the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact was announced. A *Saturday Evening Post* article claimed that the AFT was a "red" union. At the convention, Professor George Counts, a candidate of a caucus that included Teachers Guild supporters, was elected president of the AFT. He was reelected at the 1940 convention. The next winter the AFT's executive council held hearings on Locals 5, 537, and 192, a Philadelphia local. The Council voted to recommend revocation

[91]Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union*, 27.
[92]Eaton, *The American Federation of Teachers*, 105.

of the charters of all three locals. A referendum of members was conducted by mail that included new wording of the AFT constitution that included a ban on discrimination within the union, "except that no applicant whose actions are subject to totalitarian control such as Fascist, Nazi or Communist shall be admitted to membership."[93] The membership voted to expel Local 5 from the AFT.

[93] As quoted in Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union*, 34.



Tima teaching at Evander Childs High School 1

CHAPTER FOUR

WALKING THE WALK: 1940 to 1952

In addition to her teaching, the Union, and the Party, Tima's role within her family was a major focus of her life. Despite her intense involvement in the world of labor organizing and politics, she remained fully enmeshed in family dynamics throughout her adulthood. Her immediate family, parents David and Olga, older sister Ryah, and younger brothers George and Eugene, consumed a space that in others might have been devoted to partner and offspring. Each person in the family was vibrant, creative, intelligent, opinionated, and passionate. While these qualities facilitated a high level of involvement with each other it also made for tensions. The family was an arena for each member to work out political, artistic, and emotional issues.

David and Olga were by all accounts remarkable. Both distinguished themselves as cultured, educated, and caring people. Both were secular Jews who made the transition from "old world" to new easily. Both were ripe for the opportunities that were available to them. Their partnership enabled David to establish a successful building business in which he could use both his creativity as an architect with his down-to-earth skills as a carpenter. All four of their children (Laura, their eldest daughter, had died before they emigrated to the United States) went on to higher education: college, university, and art schools. In middle age David and Olga moved

from the Bronx to an apartment on fashionable Riverside Drive in Manhattan and eventually retired to Peekskill, a rural area north of the City.

David and Olga nurtured their children's curiosity, proclivities, and ambitions. Ryah became one of the first female industrial muralists. George established a successful business as a veterinarian and later became a deep-sea fisher and writer. Eugene was a professor of art and a working artist. And of course, there was Tima, a high school teacher, political organizer, and, in her spare time, writer, dancer, and painter.

According to Tima, Ryah started drawing and painting as a child and managed to arrange her high school schedule so she could leave before lunch to study at the Academy of Art. When she was a student at Teachers' College at Columbia University, Ryah studied under a Professor Martin. "He recognized her talent and encouraged her to work in non-traditional art forms, studying French and other European artists who were then doing experimental work."[94] After returning from her two-year study with Andre L'Hote in Paris and surveying Italian frescoes in 1928, Ryah was determined to pursue her interest in painting murals. Tima remembers,

> She had always been interested in architecture. As a youngster, she loved her father's architectural instruments and even wanted to become an architect. Mural painting thus had a particular fascination for her because it forces the artist to solve the problems of space creatively. Her interest in architecture manifested itself when she joined, as a muralist, a group consisting of an architect, a sculptor, a muralist, a landscaper. The group created a model for creative housing which was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[95]

---

[94]Tima L. Tomash to Helen Harrison, 6 Dec 1976, Laura Lloyd Private Collection.
[95]Ibid.

Ryah traveled to industrial sites around the United States gathering material for drafts of “phantom” murals, ones that she never expected to execute. She wondered at the steel mills of Pittsburgh, the Ohio mines, and lumber mills in Louisiana. Great engineering feats stood in stark contrast to the lines of unemployed and Hooverville shacks. Ryah instinctively knew that industrial capitalism was to blame for many of society’s ills. Although New York was devastated by the Depression, Ryah was involved in a vibrant, international arts community there. Among other projects, she wrote, illustrated and hand-lettered a children’s book, *The Wonder Rock*, published by Coward-McCann in 1931.

In 1933, while Tima immersed herself in teaching, union activism, and other political work, Ryah left for Mexico. Captivated by the emerging muralist movement there and undeterred by her gender she yearned to paint with others who shared her passion for art. Having been told by Diego Rivera that she had a “mural sense,” Ryah went to work with his former assistant, Pablo O’Higgins.[96] Next she went to Morelia, Michoacan, where she was invited by the government to paint a fresco on the walls of a colonial building housing the Michoacan State Museum at the University of St. Nicholas of Hidalgo. Ryah traveled around Mexico, visiting silver mines in Pachuca and a power plant in Puebla, gathering material for her mural that she would name “Modern Industry.” Not surprisingly, Ryah found “great hostility to the idea of an American artist; a woman artist; and a woman wearing pants, climbing up and down scaffolding in a government

[96] Edna Gorman, *New York Sun* 22 February 1938, 10.

building."[97] While there she met and married Juan de la Fuentes, a Mexican man "from one of the oldest Morelia families, a man completely emancipated from the Colonial customs and traditions of his city and ancestry."[98] During this time, Fuentes was appointed Chief of the Department of Labor and Industry. While Ryah waited for materials for the mural to arrive she was informed that her commission might be revoked. Unfortunately, shortly before she finished the mural there was a change in state politics that prevented her from completing it.

By the time she returned to the United States in 1935, the WPA Arts Projects were in full swing. She was invited to do a mural in the Men's Recreation Room at Bellevue Hospital's Psychiatric Department. Assisted by several WPA assistants, she painted "Central Park." Interestingly enough, Luis Arsenal, the brother-in-law of noted Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, was also working on a mural there. It was after her return from Mexico that Ryah and Tima decided to live together. They found a fabulous duplex apartment on the top floor of the Chelsea Hotel in lower Manhattan. The bottom floor of their apartment was their living quarters, in which they had a grand piano. There was a sweeping staircase going up to the next floor where Ryah had a studio in which she painted and gave art lessons.

Their niece Laura Ludins Lloyd, recalls that Tima "didn't need to be married when she lived with Ryah, they were total and complete. They were a couple. But interestingly enough she and Ryah didn't do everything

[97]Ryah Ludins, handwritten manuscript, Laura Lloyd Private Collection.
[98] Ibid.

together, not by a long shot. They had their own sets of friends. Not to say they didn't commingle. Ryah was not as politically active. So Tima had this whole political activity over here." Laura's sister Norma remembers, "Ryah's political activity had to do with her art." Laura agrees, "That's right. Ryah's whole world was art. So they didn't always socialize together. But they did have parties together. They enjoyed each other. They were always in tune."[99]

Laura reminisces that "Ryah loved to cook, not Tima. She could barely get her lunch together. And she ate the same lunch for all the years of her teaching. She had a hard boiled egg, a couple of carrot sticks and an apple. She was always very conscious of her body. She liked to eat healthy. My family knew about eating healthy long before most people did. She was a modern dancer. My mother [Sylvia] and she knew each other before my mother married my father. They were very friendly then. But after my mother became a member of the family, that all went away."[100]

According to Laura, in the late 1930s David suffered a heart attack and Tima and Ryah decided that their parents would be better off out of New York City. With Tima's and George's financial assistance they bought an old house on a former grape farm, on a steep hill outside of the town of Peekskill. The entire family would gather there on weekends. Tima and Ryah came up from the City together. Youngest son Eugene and his wife Hannah, who were both working artists in Woodstock, also visited. Once a month, George, Sylvia, and their children Laura and Norma made the three-

[99]Laura Lloyd and Norma Jane, interview by author, San Francisco, Calif., 26 March 1996.
[100] Ibid.

hour drive over windy, two-lane roads from Hartford, Connecticut, where they lived. Norma invariably threw up and Sylvia was grouchy because she "never wanted to go because she never got along with my grandparents. She'd always forget something, the cake or the turkey."[101]

Nonetheless, Laura and Norma have fond memories. "I remember when we went to Peekskill and if any of the others were there it was always for me a much more exciting occasion. I always adored Tima and Ryah and Hannah and Gene. They were very exciting people. They were funny. They were always clowning around." Norma recalls, "When I was very little we were in Peekskill and we decided to make sculpture out of clay, with plastilene clay, and I just had a wonderful time. And that was really the beginning for me of getting interested in sculpture. Everybody was doing it. Little animals and things. I remember feeling a little bit clumsy with the clay but it was fun. Mine were not as sophisticated as every one else's and I could tell that. But everybody made a big thing over them. Everybody who was there was playing with clay. And that's the kind of things that happened. My grandparents as well."[102]

Laura and Norma reminisced about those times.

> Ryah and Gene were always acting. And Tima was not. She was more reserved. She had a great sense of humor but it was much more reserved. She was totally reserved. Tima always sat like this. [Sits erect.] She was proper. In that sense. She had been a dancer and I think that's what made her with the rigid spine. And also somewhere along the line she must have figured out that her clothes looked better if she sat up straight. That would have been important to her. Gene and Ryah played. A lot of play.

[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

> And George played. The three of them played. But Tima never really forgot that she was a teacher, did she? Tima had important business in life. And that carried through totally.[103]

Despite the wonderful times had by the children, Laura recalls that there were underlying tensions.

> Tima and George, and I suppose Ryah when she was alive, were always angry with each other. George and Tima supported them [David and Olga]. Gene was excused because he was a working artist and Ryah was excused because *she* was a working artist. They didn't need to do anything. But Tima and George could never agree on how much, what the money was supposed to be used for. And George always thought he was doing it all. Which was not true. And also, in our family, being an artist was the most important thing, whatever your art form was, that was the most important thing. For example, my father always felt like he was looked down upon by the rest of the family. Even though he was an artist in many things he was not a professional artist. So a professional artist was somebody who spent their time and energy creating art. I imagine that a great deal of the time Tima supported Ryah. There were a lot of times when Ryah had no source of income that was obvious, although she did teach at home. I'm sure that Ryah was not expected by Tima to be very active politically. Because her political activity was in her mural work.[104]

Laura describes the unique family expectations and dynamics.

> Our family, the Ludins, didn't have the same kind of attachment to family that I thought my friends had. Family occasions were wonderful, and they were quite regular and when I look back on it I see a very full family life, but we had what I guess is a small family. In fact there weren't any other children but us on that side of the family. An uncle and two aunts and none of them had children. We had family things together and we were certainly part of one another, but we also were totally separate. There would be long periods of time that would go by when I would have no contact. It was perfectly

[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

> acceptable not to have contact and it was perfectly acceptable to have contact. It wasn't the kind of obligation feeling that I notice that so many families seem to have. It wasn't like that.[105]

Norma recalls that Tima was very private about her love life. In her forties, Norma discovered she was a lesbian. When she told Tima, Norma fully expected that she was going to tell her about experiences of hers. But that didn't happen. "Her reaction was certainly not judgmental but totally (ignorant is not a word I can use with Tima) naive, totally naive; she had no idea about lesbians. None."[106] When Laura confided to Tima that her daughter Joan was a lesbian, Tima was puzzled that Joan might not have children, even though she herself didn't have children. "She absolutely couldn't understand lesbians. She didn't know what lesbians would do with each other sexually."[107] Tima, however, was not one for regrets. Not having children "was just like everything that happened with Tima, it seemed to be that's the way it is so that's the way it's supposed to be. I never heard her regret anything."[108]

Tima daily made the reverse commute by subway from downtown Manhattan to the Bronx. Although she'd been teaching for about twenty years, her dedication and enthusiasm never flagged. Conditions in the schools were worse than ever. Still feeling the effects of Depression era shortages, the schools suffered during World War II. The military call-up took many male high school teachers and resources for non-military

---

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

projects were limited. Tima tried her best to bring these deficiencies to the attention of school administrators and rally the teachers to protest conditions. At staff meetings she reported on actions that the union was taking to ameliorate these problems.

After the War, school enrollment boomed and classrooms were as crowded as ever. Tima regularly had forty students in a classroom. She notified the principal, as she was entitled to do, and two students would be transferred to another classroom. Just days later four more students would show up to take their places. This scene was repeated semester after semester. In addition to crowding, teachers noticed a change in the students' academic readiness and ability to focus on the assigned subjects. Students tended to be more unruly and difficult to discipline. More had learning disabilities; some were poor Blacks or Puerto Ricans with inadequate previous schooling.[109] Nonetheless Tima plugged away.

While Tima's work in the classroom required patience and diligence, the union was out in the streets in New York City and Albany protesting for better working conditions. The Teachers Union did not spend much time representing teachers or bringing individual grievances to the District since it was not until 1962 that the union became the legal bargaining unit in the schools. Instead they focused on broader, political change. For example, in 1940 they managed to send 1500 teachers, 500 parents, and 4,000 other trade unionists by special train to Albany to demonstrate in support of Governor Lehman's request for full state funding for the schools. Tima and

[109] A 1947 postcard to David Ludins from a former neighbor on Jennings Street, in their old neighborhood, notes that "I am the only white man on the block." Laura Lloyd Collection.

others at Local 5 distributed a half million leaflets and 50,000 copies of a special edition of *New York Teacher* calling for support for the schools. Throughout the 1940s the union kept up a vigorous pace demanding better working and learning conditions. Tima never failed to show up for union events. She never shirked from doing the mundane work of organizing: stuffing envelopes, walking a picket line, marching at the Board of Education, polling teachers at her school, organizing fundraising events. She was a trooper, gladly doing what was asked, neither asking for recognition nor hoping for a promotion to union leadership.

The little we know about Tima's activity in the Communist Party during this period comes from her nieces and from testimony of informants like John Lautner and Bella Dodd in front of the SISS hearings in New York City in the fall of 1952. While neither of these sources comes anywhere near to giving a true, full picture of her work, they do provide a flavor or glimpse of what she might have been doing. Laura Lloyd surmises that Tima tried to recruit teachers from Evander Childs into the Party or at least into the union. Laura's sister Norma wonders whether she had responsibilities outside of the school. Laura doesn't think that Tima was ever on any of the borough or citywide committees. "I think she kind of stayed on her own . . . she knew everybody but I think she liked 'hands-on,' and she didn't want to move out of that milieu. And the Party itself when I was in it, which was back in that time, functioned in very small groups. Of course Tima was beyond that because everybody knew her. But everybody else was trying not to get known and so we had contact with just a few

people. And if you had contact with people outside your own cell, it was only one or two other people. So it was very compartmentalized." Norma recalls, "She was known because she'd been around for such a long time. Since the times in the 'thirties when it was okay to be outspoken." Laura continues, "During the War it was okay to be for Russia at various moments. And certainly during the last year of the War it was wonderful. I personally worked for the Russian Relief Organization that sent clothes and food to Russia; they were starving there. . . . Whenever anyone wanted a speaker on anything to do with Russia, they asked Tima. So she was widely known toward being in favor of the Soviet Union. And if you were in favor of the Soviet Union you were ergo in favor of communism. Before Stalin got to be the bad guy, he was adored. He was called Uncle Joe, by everybody."[110]

In the late 1940s, John Lautner, a Hungarian immigrant, was appointed head of the Communist Party's New York State cadre and review commission, where he was charged with supervising security organization. According to David Caute, he was expelled from the Party in 1950 following false accusations of Titoism and being an FBI agent.[111] To add insult to injury, his wife believed the charges and took off with their child. Within two years, Lautner had indeed become a professional informer and witness in Smith Act trials across the nation. In October 1952 he testified before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee that he and May Miller were assigned to organize CP teachers to go underground in a fashion similar to that being planned for the Party in general. He named Tima as the person

[110] Ibid.
[111] Caute, *The Great Fear*, 125.

assigned to the task of representing the teachers. He recounted that Tima was responsible for organizing about 500 Communist Party teachers. She was accused, among other things, of circulating a communist publication, *The Challenge*, at her high school. Further, he stated that Tima attended high-level meetings in which Bella Dodd's expulsion was planned. Dodd, a CP member turned informer, in March 1953, testified that Tima was a member of the Coordinating Committee of the Communist Teachers of New York City, representing the Bronx, and that she was later appointed the Chairmanship. Was Tima an ordinary rank and file CP member, as her niece thinks, or was she responsible for the organization of hundreds of teachers into an underground cadre, as Lautner proclaimed?

Ryah and George, niece Laura in hat 1

Ryah and Juan de la Fuentes in Mexico 1

Tima Ludins 2

George, Eugene, Tima, Olga and David Ludins in Peekskill 1

CHAPTER FIVE

CAUGHT IN THE NET

The post-World War II witch hunts were national, concerted, media-driven efforts by right wingers to assert political control. The Cold War provided the excuse. But, as we have seen, the use of government committees, loyalty oaths, and employment purges had been a tactic in use since World War I. National, state, and local governments worked together to silence progressive voices. In New York City, the national hysteria was channeled to fuel the long-standing desire to eliminate the Teachers Union. As a number of historians have pointed out, the period known as the "'50s" actually began in the late 1940s. In 1947 President Truman issued the Loyalty Order and many were called by the House Un-American Activities Committee to testify about their beliefs. In 1948 a United States Senate Subcommittee took an unprecedented move: they called a local official, New York City Schools Superintendent William Jansen and conservative Board member George Timone to testify about the Teachers Union. This joint federal-local effort would be repeated with devastating consequences for Tima just a few years later.

In 1949, New York State passed the Feinberg Law, designed to ferret out teachers who were members of subversive groups. A year later, emboldened by the law, even while it was being challenged in court, Superintendent Jansen suspended and later fired eight teachers (all union members and long-time allies of Tima) for refusing to cooperate with his

demand for loyalty statements. It was no coincidence that all of the teachers were Jewish.

The firing were due to both anti-Semitism and the fact that a preponderance of politically active union members were Jewish. First, the School Board had a number of anti-Semitic members, including George Timone, who had strong ties to the leadership of the Catholic Church. While it is difficult to point to published statements proving Timone's anti-Semitism (and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to research that evidence), historians such as Murphy and Zitron assert that he did harbor anti-Semitic attitudes. And individual New Yorkers, unrestrained by having to uphold a public image, sent virulently anti-Semitic letters to the Teachers Union during this time.[112]

There undoubtedly was an anti-Semitic element in the fact that the fired teachers were all Jewish, difficult as that may be to "prove." But it was also true that the School Board was anxious to rid the system of troublemakers and the Teachers Union had been a source of sustained agitation for school reform. The Teachers Union's leadership and a large percentage of its membership were Jewish. If the desire was to eliminate the most outspoken rabble-rousers then the outcome was the inevitable firing of Jewish teachers. While not all Jewish teachers were union members, the union was predominantly Jewish. While not all Teachers Union members were Party members, a significant minority was. In the

[112] Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 191.

minds of many, Judaism was equated with union membership, which was synonymous with communism.

In the Summer and Fall of 1951 and the Spring of 1952 the McCarren Senate Internal Security Subcommittee held hearings in New York City on subversion in the schools. Superintendent Jansen hired Saul Moskoff to coordinate the investigation for the City. One wonders whether Jansen intentionally chose a Jewish man to deflect charges of anti-Semitism. At the federal level three draconian laws (Subversive Activities Control Act, 1950; Emergency Detention Act, 1950; and the McCarren Act, 1952) added to a climate of fear for foreign-born activists like Tima.

Following the SISS hearings in October, the Board of Education dismissed, without even the pretense of a trial, five additional teachers who had refused to cooperate with the Committee by invoking the Fifth Amendment. The Board of Higher Education dismissed three professors who testified. While the dismissals were challenged in court it took until 1956 for the school district to stop using Section 903 to justify these types of firings. Celia Zitron believes that "the use of congressional investigating committees was the quickest and most devious method used by school authorities to dismiss teachers."[113]

On October 24, 1952, Tima acted decisively. She penned a letter to the School District announcing her retirement as of October 27. She had to make this difficult decision because she knew that John Lautner had named her earlier in the month at SISS hearings held in New York City. She knew

[113]Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union*, 241.

that the Board of Education was about to call her to testify and that if she refused she would be fired, losing not only her job but also her pension earned by almost thirty years of dedicated work. It seemed like retiring with some pension was the prudent thing to do. After all, she had Ryah and her parents to look after. We do not know with whom Tima consulted to make her decision. Did she talk with her family? No one from that generation is left to say. Did she talk with other CP members? Did she discuss her decision with other teachers or union members? Perhaps she made the decision by herself.

And indeed, on the very day that she filed for retirement, William Jansen, New York City Superintendent of Schools, sent her a letter requesting her to appear at a Board of Education hearing on October 31. Tima knew that she could not and would not testify. At 4:40 in the afternoon of the day of her scheduled testimony Tima phoned Saul Moskoff, Assistant Corporation Counsel in charge of investigating subversive activities in the New York City public schools, and told him that she was not going to appear because her retirement had gone into effect on October 27. The School Board had accomplished what it wanted. Tima was just one of roughly 400 teachers who would lose their jobs either through dismissal, retirement, or resignation during this period.[114]

Shortly after her resignation, Tima received a letter from Hymen Alpern, the Evander Childs Principal. “It was quite a shock to me when you

[114]Ellen Broidy, “Enforcing the ABC’s of Loyalty: Gender, Subversion and the Politics of Education in the New York City Public Schools, 1948-1954.” (Ph.D diss., University of California, Irvine, 1997), 303.

unexpectedly announced your retirement from Evander and the school system which you have served so well for thirty-two years [It was actually almost thirty years, 1923 to 1952]. Let me express to you officially and personally my sincere appreciation of your devotion, loyalty and efficiency. I congratulate you on the beginning of a vacation which I hope will be long, healthful, and happy. You are now an honorary member of the staff. In your new role you will have all the privileges of regular members of the staff (except that your check will be a little smaller) and you will be expected to share our joys and sorrows as in the past. I do hope that you will drop in to see us from time to time and break bread with us."[115]

Minutes from an Evander staff meeting report: "Mr. Raubicheck announced the retirement of Miss Ludins. He expressed his regret at losing a teacher of such warmth, sincerity, and directness of appeal. He commented on her long and valuable service in our department, pointing out that she always taught 'the pupil' rather than 'the subject,' and that she had in every lesson something worthwhile for the students in her room."[116]

It was not until the following March that Tima was called to Washington DC to testify at the Congressional hearings. Indignant that her integrity was being challenged, she vowed to make the most of the experience. Tima and her attorney, Joseph Forer, took the train ride down to DC to discuss her testimony. She was adamant that she would invoke both the First and Fifth Amendments. Direct and to the point, Tima relished

[115]Hymen Alpern to Tima Ludins, 29 October 1952. Laura Lloyd private collection.
[116]English Department Conference Minutes, 10 November 1952. Laura Lloyd private collection.

her opportunity to air her views. Despite virulent badgering by the Committee Tima maintained her poise and her principled stand throughout.

> MORRIS. Do you think a member of the Communist Party can be a good teacher, Miss Ludins?
> LUDINS. I think any teacher who has the qualifications and does a good, efficient job as a teacher is qualified, be that person a Communist, a Catholic, or anything else at all.
> MORRIS. Do you think a member of the Nazi Party can be a good teacher?
> LUDINS. I think a Nazi who keeps his ideas to himself, locked in his own head, and never incites to racial hatred in the classroom, as May Quinn and other Nazis in our schools did, I think anyone who teaches well in the classroom, according to the things she is supposed to teach, is a teacher who has the right to teach.
> CHAIRMAN. Who is to police the teachers in the classroom to see that they are not putting out fanatic doctrines?
> LUDINS. Are we coming to a police state where you want policing?
> CHAIRMAN. Who is to determine that they do not put in their prejudices?
> LUDINS. If you ask me who is to police them, I will say I didn't know we have a police state. I can't answer that. That would be sad.
> CHAIRMAN. I will ask you this way: Do you think it is possible—
> LUDINS. I haven't finished the answer to that question. I think, however, that when we have a democratic system of education, we have chairmen of departments, we have principals, we have supervisors who observe the classes and make reports on this teaching they observed. We have no police state yet, I am glad to say.
> CHAIRMAN. Do you think it is possible for a fanatical Communist to keep his views from being spread into the classroom?
> LUDINS. I know that the Board of Education has not been able to produce one iota of evidence that any teacher has ever taught anything in the classroom but the subject which she was to teach. If they had that, don't you think, Mr. Jenner, that that would have been in banner headlines in the press, even more than this mysterious Tima that is supposed to be the mystery? If they had one iota of proof that any teacher taught anything in the classroom but her subject that she was supposed to teach, they would have produced that evidence, but there wasn't one bit of evidence like that.[117]

Tima continued sparring with Eastland over the responsibility of citizens, teachers, and investigating bodies. She never once let the Senator

[117] U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary. *Hearings on Subversive Influence in the Educational Process*. 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 10, 24 February and 3 March 1953, 488-89.

take control over the questioning. Rather, she engaged him in a discussion of the meaning of democracy.

> MORRIS. Does the Soviet Union have a strong democracy?
> LUDINS. I don't know. I have an awfully hard time working to keep democracy here.
> EASTLAND. Let me ask you a question: Is this democracy you talk of the democracy Vishinsky and Stalin speak of?
> LUDINS. This is what Jefferson and Roosevelt spoke of.
> EASTLAND. Do you think that Jefferson and Roosevelt would have refused to give a committee of the American Congress information?
> LUDINS. You see, in the time of Jefferson, with the alien and sedition laws, Jefferson was working to undo those laws, and I am working to undo this kind of committee. We are doing exactly the same thing, to return my country to the path of democracy. We are working for the same thing. If Jefferson sat here, he would agree with everything that I say.
> EASTLAND. The Russian brand? You would not have a committee like this in the Soviet Union?
> LUDINS. The people there will take care of their committees. I am interested in the people trying to smear people and pretend there are mysterious people hiding their names.
> EASTLAND: Lady, aren't you smearing yourself?
> LUDINS. No; I think I am upholding democracy, even as all our great people in this country--and all our little people have upheld democracy and are doing, up to this moment.[118]

On and on they went, each Senator querying their witness. Each one was motivated by the press attention they would undoubtedly receive for their efforts: headlines in both hometown and national newspapers announcing the patriotic fervor with which they attacked the dreaded Communist. But Tima was able to engage some of them in matters of substance and to expound on her personal code of ethics.

> JOHNSTON. If one of your children had come into the schoolroom, what would you tell that child [about the causes of the Korean War]?
> LUDINS. I never tell my children anything--about controversial issues, pardon me.

[118] Ibid., 491-92.

JOHNSTON. Don't you say that—
LUDINS. I want to finish my sentence. I never tell my children anything about controversial issues.
JOHNSTON. We are in a war. What would you tell them?
LUDINS. May I finish? I say, on controversial issues of why are there so many people killed instead of so many [sic]. You go to sources, and they do research work. Anyone who comes into my classes finds many children out in the library doing research work, which the book librarians give them to find answers to all these controversial questions. I have no right--I have no right—
JOHNSTON. You, a teacher, would not tell them anything about the war?
LUDINS. I have no right to put answers into my children's mouths. That is what some of the teachers who don't like our methods of teaching want to get rid of. They tell them things. They say "Hitler didn't do anything except kill Jews. Otherwise he was all right." They say "The Negroes--"
JOHNSTON. We do not want to get on any race question.
LUDINS. I am sorry. That happens to be in the question you asked me.
JOHNSTON. I want to ask you one other question: If a child would ask you "Are you a Communist?" What would you tell him?
LUDINS. What child would ever come and ask such a silly question?
JOHNSTON. What would you tell that child?
LUDINS. You mean a child comes to a teacher?
JOHNSTON. Comes to you and asks: "Are you a Communist?" What would you tell that child?
LUDINS. I would say to that child, "We have a secret ballot in this country, because people have freedom of conscience, freedom to vote as they want, and freedom to think as they want," and I would give him a lesson in the Bill of Rights. [119]

Finally, over two hours after he opened the inquisition, Chairman Jenner announced, "The witness will stand aside at this time."

Laura Lloyd says, "She looked on it as one of the experiences she'd had where she'd met the enemy. . . . To her it was a victory. Yeah, she didn't like that she'd lost a lot of pension, but she was a real optimist. That's the way she looked at everything. Anybody who could be a political activist her whole life, and could think that what she was doing was

[119] Ibid., 493-94.

important and could make a difference. The reason most of us stopped being activists was that it was clear it makes no difference at all. But she never got that message. That's the kind of person she was."[120]

[120] Lloyd, interview.

Newspaper clipping

CONCLUSION

Tima returned from Washington victorious, a hero to the union. The *New York Teacher News* proclaimed, "Miss Ludins reported on her experiences before the committee at the March meeting of the Union's Delegate Assembly, which gave her an ovation for her ringing affirmation of academic freedom and her staunch support of the Bill of Rights in the face of the witch-hunting attack."[121] The union redoubled its efforts to stem the attack. They hurriedly cranked out pamphlets such as "Conformists, Informers, or Free Teachers" an expose of the witchhunt, containing excerpts from the trials of the seven dismissed teachers. The union pleaded with members to pick up copies at the union office, for distribution to their families and to parents.

Yet volume one in the life of Tima Ludins was over. She no longer had an outlet for teaching, her life's passion. Her official status in the union was reduced to that of "retired teacher."[122] She poured herself into her life's remaining commitments: the Party and her family. She remained in the Party for the rest of her life. She did not join the thousands of people who fled the Party in 1956 when Khrushchev revealed many of the horrors of the Stalin years and the Soviet Union invaded Hungary. She was among the 3,000 diehards remaining in the Party by 1957. The FBI started investigating Tima after she was named by Lautner in the fall of 1952. While containing much misinformation, her FBI file does reveal that she was

---

[121] *New York Teacher News,* 14 March 1953.

[122] By 1960 she did find work as a teacher at Beth Jacob Beth Miriam School in the Bronx. It is hard to imagine the secular Tima teaching at a religious school; she must have desperately needed the paycheck.

active in the American Peace Crusade, the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, and the National Council of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions, all Communist “front” organizations in 1954. And she explored buried parts of herself. Six weeks after testifying in Congress, she exhibited her paintings in a three-person show at the Teachers’ Center.

In 1956 her mother Olga died. A year later her sister, Ryah, passed away after an excruciating brain tumor. Her sister’s death devastated her. Laura Lloyd recalls visiting Tima several years after Ryah’s death. “She attached such great significance to her life with Ryah in the Hotel Chelsea. I remember we went there when she was breaking it apart and deciding what to take with her and what not to take, that was the most emotional I ever saw Tima. She was changing her life, uprooting herself and going to California. And she’d lived there forever. Particularly upstairs in the studio. And that was a long time after Ryah died.”[123] By that time Tima had been living with Sam Tomash, a union printer and CP member, in Tima’s apartment. Four years after Ryah’s death, at the age of sixty-three, Tima married Sam, on the very day his divorce was finalized. Within six months they had moved to California where Tima continued her political work for another twenty years.

In 1960, members of Local 2, the Teachers’ Guild, and the unaffiliated High School Teachers Association, under the leadership of David Selden, formed the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). That year, with a base of 4,000 members, the union called a strike. The Teachers Union did not

[123]Lloyd, interview.

support the walkout. After one day on the picket lines union teachers went back to work. While that brief burst of militancy did not achieve its goal, it did catalyze the unionization movement. In 1961 the Board of Education agreed to collective bargaining with teachers. The UFT, the Teachers Union, and the NEA-backed Collective Bargaining Organization vied for representation. The Teachers Union, having fought for the rights of teachers for forty-five years, came in last with just 2575 votes.

By April 1962 the UFT signed a collective bargaining agreement with the Board of Education. Most Teachers Union members were skeptical that the UFT would champion the issues for which they'd been fighting. Despite their lack of legal status, most wanted their union to continue raising issues, including "reading retardation, bias in textbooks, debunking the IQ myth, repeal of the Feinberg Laws, repeal of the disclaimer oath on application blanks for teaching positions, the need for a Negro History Week publication, raising the professional sights of teachers, need for academic freedom in the classroom, and integration of the New York City school system."[124] However, in November 1963 the Teachers Union membership finally voted to disband the union.

The drive to decimate the Teachers Union that had been given a boost a decade earlier from the anti-Communist witchhunt was finally successful. It is difficult to conjecture with certainty how race relations within the New York City schools would have been altered if the Teachers Union had survived. Many agree that the Teachers Union had been a persistent voice

[124] Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union*, 51.

for the improvement of educational services to Black communities since the Depression. As Ellen Broidy makes amply clear in her dissertation, "The ABCs of Loyalty," both the union's campaigns and school assignment decisions made by individual union teachers were significant factors in helping redress racially based inequities in the system. After the death of the Teachers Union, the UFT made collective bargaining gains for teachers but negotiations took place without a sophisticated understanding of how racism affected the City's schools. Many felt that the white union, representing a largely Jewish membership, was improving working conditions at the expense of Black communities. During the late 1960s the UFT took positions that undermined Black communities' quest for a say in their children's education. It is hard to imagine that Black Jewish relations would have deteriorated so markedly if the Teacher's Union been a part of the political equation.

Tima Ludins lived a life on the left. Hers was just one life, one that was unremarkable in many ways and extraordinary in others. The longevity of her involvement in leftist politics was striking. Her understanding of class politics probably dates to her college years, if not earlier. We do not have evidence of her active political participation until she joined the union in 1933.[125] Even if that was her first political undertaking, her activism continued unabated for another fifty years. Her lifelong guiding principle was her membership in the Communist Party.

---

[125] On page 59 of this thesis there is a picture of her and her mother, Olga, on the roof of their Charlotte Street apartment building, captioned "May Day 1923." We do not know whether they were celebrating the beginning of spring or International Workers Day.

Tima's participation in the Communist Party may have been the reason that she continued to be consciously engaged in the issues of her day after others abandoned political activity. Many people would argue that it made sense to leave the Party in 1939 after the Hitler-Stalin pact and that it was only the crazies who remained members after the Khrushchev revelations and Hungary in 1956; continued membership meant blind acceptance of Stalinist policies and practices. Many people who left the Party find it appealing to discount their activist days as misguided youthful enthusiasm. Now they are realistically cynical, discouraged but open-eyed. This attitude is dismissive of, and diminishes, the life's work of people like Tima Ludins. Tima may have been duped by the Soviet line but she never failed to act on her principles. She walked picket lines, signed petitions, made financial donations, and took minutes at meetings in order to make her contribution to a more just world. She never gave up.

A close examination of Tima's life adds a dimension to history that historians like Harvey Klehr miss in their analyses. Klehr argues against the relevance of the rank and file and for the supremacy of Comintern dictates in understanding the history of the CP in the United States. He concludes the *Heyday of American Communism* with the observation, "While Party policy might have been applied in America, it was being made abroad, not to suit the needs of American Communists but to satisfy the needs of the Soviet Union."[126] He goes so far as to say that this is an "essential clue about its nature."[127]

[126] Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*. 416.
[127] Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*. 415.

Klehr's analysis tells part of the story. It focuses on policies, organizational structures, and hierarchical power. It explains chains of command; it accounts for the unwavering loyalty to constantly changing, Soviet-inspired directives that *was* required of Party members. However, it privileges policies made abroad over the actions, thoughts, and passionate stances of Tima, and other political activists in the United States. Looking at Tima's life elevates, or brings to the foreground, this element of history. It is not possible to view Tima's life and conclude that the key to understanding the Communist Party in the United States is its allegiance to the Soviet Union. It does seem true that the Comintern directed the American CP's policies. Yet ending the story there discounts the actual work of the Party on several levels.

First, the CP maintained a policy through 1933 that workers should organize unions outside of the AFL. Using Klehr's analysis, how do we account for the Teachers Union, an AFL union since 1916? Klehr fails to mention the Teachers Union in over 400 pages on the CP during the Depression. One may conclude that Klehr does not look at the Teachers Union as an important part of CP history. Interestingly enough, the Comintern would probably have agreed with Klehr. Teachers were not industrial workers and therefore not critical to the Comintern's desire to organize basic industry. The Comintern did not view American educational institutions as worthy of infiltration; they preferred to use their own schools for revolutionary activity.[128] Further, many union members were Jewish,

[128] For more information on the Soviets' educational philosophy see Iverson, *The Communists in the Schools*.

whom the Soviet Union did not consider among the higher priority “native born” to cultivate as leaders.

Second, it does not seem possible to reconcile Tima’s work with the idea that the Soviet CP had complete control over the CP in the U.S. Tima worked for twenty years, ten months a year, probably close to twelve hours a day, as a teacher and a member of both the Teachers Union and the Communist Party. She mimeographed leaflets, organized fundraising bazaars, raised issues in meetings, distributed union newspapers, picketed the Board of Education, and encouraged other teachers to take an activist role day in and day out. She was relentless. She was motivated by conditions she experienced, beliefs that she held, and the direction that she took from the Party. Yes, the CP would have expelled Tima had she held steadfast to a position contrary to Party line. The CP was indeed a hierarchically based organization with a limited tolerance for dissent. But her dedication to teaching, to improving the lives of New York City students, and to creating a more just world was as much the “essential” CP as anything else.

As a rank and file member, Tima carried out CP policy in a way that was directly influenced by her experience as a secular Jewish, Russian immigrant who had had educational and vocational opportunities available to her. Her residence in New York, the neighborhoods in which she lived and taught, the people with whom she socialized and was politically active made her a uniquely American Party member. And, she was surrounded by thousands of others who shared a similar experience.

Nathan Glazer views the mid-1930s to the mid-'50s as the CP's time of greatest influence. Its membership was largely drawn from the Jewish middle class, particularly in New York City, although he does point to the difficulty of obtaining statistics about Party make-up. Demographically, then, Tima was a "typical" member. Glazer asserts, "The Party was so heavily middle class in large part because it was so heavily Jewish."[129]

The Party itself did not want to publicize that so many of its members were Jewish. During the period in which Tima joined the Party, it started to pursue an aggressive policy of Americanizing its leadership and membership. In 1936, Max Steinberg reported: "Today 45 per cent of our section organizers are native-born as compared with the 100 per cent foreign born in 1934."[130] Tima had been critical of the New York City schools' Americanization program when she taught night school. Did she object to the CP's desire to recruit "Americans?" Given her own Americanized status as an English-speaking, college-educated woman, Tima herself may have been the type of member Steinberg was bragging about. On the other hand, Tima's Jewishness, rather than her birthplace, may have placed her outside of the native-born category.

Glazer speaks to the wide variety of Jews in the Party. Many were Yiddish speaking. They came from Russia, Hungary, and other eastern European countries. They were textile workers, teachers, and bookkeepers. Some came from an Orthodox upbringing, others from decidedly secular

---

[129] Glazer, *Social Basis of American Communism*, 131.
[130] Max Steinberg, "Problems of Party Growth in New York," *The Communist*, July 1936, 662 as quoted in Glazer, *Social Basis of American Communism*, 223.

homes. Most did live in New York City. Tima, as an English-speaking, secular teacher, is a good example of one type of Jewish CP member. It is only in looking at the lives of a variety of people that one can get a complete picture of Jews in the CP.

Vivian Gornick observes of Party adherents, "For the law of passion is such that it is all; and when a thing becomes all, people do terrible things to themselves and to one another."[131] Perhaps her devotion to her teaching and her family saved Tima from the fire that consumed many others. From all accounts, Tima adored teaching. No doubt she had a political agenda, but when faced with a class of teenagers her politics became secondary. Her mission was to open up the world for those kids. She taught them to see beyond their grimy working-class neighborhood, to stretch their minds beyond what was immediately evident. She enjoined them to take advantage of opportunity and to live life to its fullest. Her passion for education was a gift she shared with thousands.

Tima never left the emotional center of her biological family of origin. It was that constellation of relationships that anchored her throughout her life. Her parents, particularly her father, were an ever-present lighthouse. Her sister Ryah was her partner until death. Tima was an adoring younger sister, caring for most of Ryah's financial and emotional needs, the bedrock for Ryah's creativity. Her relationship with her eldest brother, George, was strained but she never abandoned it. Politically and socially at odds they both took responsibility for their parents in old age. Tima was an important

[131] Gornick, *Romance of American Communism*, 15.

figure in the lives of both of George's children. Tima and Eugene followed different paths but always maintained a cordial relationship. They knew they could always count on each other if necessary.

Besides viewing her role in the family as primary, Tima identified strongly as a teacher, a union member, and as a political activist. From what can be gathered, she seemed relatively uninterested in seeing herself as either a woman or a Jew. Tima did not renounce the expected middle-class female role; she merely lived her life in such a way as to stay unmarried and working. She was in the minority as a female high school teacher but did not view this as a particular challenge. In her family, dynamics were based on each one's commitment to class politics or to art, not gender. And she was certainly not encouraged to identify as female by the Communist Party, which did not acknowledge gender as a prominent category of analysis, although at times they did address the "woman question." Since Tima was a stalwart Party member she probably agreed with the Party that religion was the opiate of the masses. She had grown up in a home that did not observe religious rituals and never adopted them herself as an adult. If asked, she would acknowledge that her family was Jewish, but seems to have only focused on it to the extent that it was expedient to the Party. If anything, she would have identified as ethnically Jewish and religiously atheist.

Judaism is frequently associated with excessive materialism, religious rituals, Zionism, and liberalism. If Tima did not repudiate these positions and characteristics she certainly avoided them in her life. She lived her life,

as many others did and do; as a Jew, among Jews, yet not identified with rabbinic traditions. Reared in the politically and religiously diverse environment of early twentieth century Jewish New York, Tima and others like her have become almost invisible to public consciousness with the passage of time. Despite this invisibility, Tima represented a strand of Jewish secularism which was not uncommon for her generation. Many Jews chose secular routes toward political ends, including the paths of Communism, Socialism and Zionism. Some secular Jews consciously merged their Jewish identities with their identities as political activists. Tima did not.

Despite Tima's lack of self-consciousness about gender and ethnicity, her life was profoundly influenced by the fact of her birth as a female Jew in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. Not all Jews in this particular time and place in history made the same choices as Tima and her family. But many did. And not all immigrant Jewish teachers were members of the Communist Party. But many were. Looking at Tima's life gives us no answers about causality. But it does allow us to see that specific conditions encouraged certain types of behavior. Despite being raised in the same environment, each of the Ludins children made different choices. For the most part, though, these choices were in keeping with their parents' values and the communities in which they were raised.

A number of factors set the stage for Tima to follow a life committed to peace and justice. Her father David was a principled man who followed his convictions. He understood class politics and believed that people

working together could effect change. He came of age during a surge in revolutionary politics in Russia. It was also a time of increased persecution of and educational opportunities for Jews. Tima was just a child when she left Russia for the United States but growing up in the Bronx in an immigrant Jewish community gave her ample opportunity to absorb the sense that she and her family left a homeland that was filled with explicit, militant anti-Semitism. She was aware of her status as an outsider against whom many were prejudiced.

Anti-Semitism in the United States took different, less virulent forms. While Tima encountered anti-Semitism in her life, she found her way into the American middle class. She came of age during a time when public education was burgeoning. As her family hoped, she thrived in academic settings that were being created as a result of capital's needs for a more highly educated workforce and the needs of political elites for Americanized residents. The New York City school system provided her with both education and career opportunities that allowed her to remain single and politically engaged.

Tima's family remembers her as someone who stood up for her convictions. She was an extraordinary person who "walked the walk and talked the talk" but who did it in a way that did not attract notice nor acclaim. Those who are familiar with the history of the U.S. Communist Party or labor history have never heard of Tima Ludins. She was most visible to the public when her life intersected with Congressional scrutiny.

That moment was one of glory for her but it was just one moment in a long life of activism.

Tima and Sam

SOURCES CONSULTED

Primary Sources

Manuscript Collections & Public Records

U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary. *Hearings on Subversive Influence in the Educational Process*. 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 10, 24 February and 3 March 1953.

U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, *Hearings on Subversive Influence in the Educational Process*. 82nd Cong., 2nd sess., 8, 9, 10, 23, 24, 25 September and 13 October 1952.

U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, *Subversive Influence in the Educational Process.* 82nd Cong., 2nd sess. 2 January 1953. Committee Print

Hunter College Archives, New York, NY.

Lloyd, Laura. Private collection.

MacLean, Daniel, Collection. North Baker Library, California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA.

New York City Board of Education Collection. Special Collections, Teachers' College, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Teachers Union of the City of New York, 1916-1964 Collection. Labor Management Documents Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

Tomash, Tima Ludins, file. U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, DC.

Newspapers

California Senior Citizen, October 1987.
Daily News (New York), 4 March 1953.
Daily Worker, 4 March 1953
Golden Circle News (Emeritus College, Santa Monica College), Fall 1988.
New York Herald Tribune, 4 March 1953.
New York Post, 3 March 1953.

New York Sun, 22 February 1938.
New York Teacher News, 9 January 1943 – 24 June 1953
New York Times, 4 March 1953
New York World-Telegram and Sun, 4 March 1953
Washington Post, 25 January 1953
West County (Alameda) *Times*, 14 June 1990

Interviews

Jane, Norma & Laura Lloyd. Interview by author. San Francisco, Calif., 26 March 1996.
Lloyd, Laura. Interview by author. San Francisco, Calif., 14 March 1996.
Wallach, Sam. Telephone conversation with author. June 1996.

Books

Charney, George. A Long Journey. Chicago: Quadrangle, 1968.

Chernin, Kim. In My Mother's House. New York: Tichnor & Fields, 1983.

Cohen, Rose. Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side. 1918. Reprint, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Gold, Michael. Jews Without Money. Garden City, NY: The Sun Dial Press, 1930.

Goldman, Emma. Living My Life. 1930. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970.
Gornick, Vivian. Fierce Attachments: A Memoir. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1987.

Healey, Dorothy Ray and Maurice Isserman, California Red: A Life in the American Communist Party. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Metzker, Isaac, ed. A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the *Jewish Daily Forward*. New York: Schocken Books, 1971.

Radosh, Ronald. Commies: A Journey Through the Old Left, the New Left, and the Leftover Left. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001.

Richmond, Al. A Long View From the Left: Memoirs of an American Revolutionary. New York: Delta Books, 1975.

Simon, Kate. Bronx Primitive: Portraits in a Childhood. New York: Viking Press, 1982.

---. A Wider World: Portraits in an Adolescence. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

Spewack, Bella. Streets: A Memoir of the Lower East Side. New York: The Feminist Press, 1995.

Yezierska, Anzia. Bread Givers: A Novel: A Struggle Between a Father of the Old World and a Daughter of the New. c. 1925. Reprint. New York: G. Braziller, 1975.

Articles

Ludins, David. "Memories of Woodbine: 1891-1894." *Frontiers*, June 1960: 7-15.

Secondary Sources

Books

Alpern, Sara, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, Ingrid Winther Scobie, eds. The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Bateson, Mary Catherine. Composing a Life. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.

Baum, Charlotte, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel. The Jewish Woman in America. New York: New American Library, 1977.

Belfrage, Cedric. The American Inquisition, 1945-1960. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1973.

Brumberg, Stephan. Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York City. New York: Praeger, 1986.

Caute, David. The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978.

Eaton, William Edward. The American Federation of Teachers, 1916-1961: A History of the Movement. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

Evans, Sara. Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left. New York: Knopf, 1979.

Glazer, Nathan. The Social Basis of American Communism. Communism in American Life, ed. Clinton Rossiter. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961.

Glenn, Susan A. Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Gorelick, Sherry. City College and the Jewish Poor: Education in New York, 1880-1924. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981.

Gornick, Vivian. The Romance of American Communism. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977.

Hammack, David C. Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982

Heale, M. J. McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998.

Herscher, Uri. Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880-1910. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981.

Howe, Irving with Kenneth Libo. World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976.

Hyman, Paula E. Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.

Isserman, Maurice. Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982.

Iverson, Robert. The Communists and the Schools. A volume in the series, Communism in American Life, Clinton Rossiter, General Editor. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959.

Kann, Kenneth. Joe Rapoport: The Life of a Jewish Radical. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981.

Kessner, Carole S. The "Other" New York Jewish Intellectuals. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Klehr, Harvey. The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade. New York: Basic Books, 1984.

Klehr, Harvey and John Earl Haynes. The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

Markowitz, Ruth Jacknow, My Daughter, the Teacher: Jewish Teachers in the New York City Schools. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993.

Mendelsohn, Ezra. Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Moore, Deborah Dash. At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

Murphy, Marjorie. Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Naison, Mark. Communists in Harlem During the Depression. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c1983.

Navasky, Victor. Naming Names. Viking Press, 1980; NY: Penguin Books, 1981.

Orleck, Annelise. Common Sense & a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Raisin, Jacob. The Haskalah Movement in Russia. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1914.

Ribalow, Harold. Autobiographies of American Jews. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965.

Rischin, Moses. The Promised City: New York's Jews 1870 – 1914. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Sachar, Howard. The Course of Modern Jewish History. Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1958.

Sanders, Ronald. Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration. New York: Schocken Books, 1988.

Schrecker, Ellen. No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986

-- Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998

Scott, Joan Wallach. Gender and the Politics of History. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Selden, David. Teacher Rebellion. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1985.

Shannon, David. The Decline of American Communism: A History of the Communist Party Since 1945. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959.

Shepard, Naomi. A Price Below Rubies: Jewish Women as Rebels and Radicals. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Sorin, Gerald. Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals, 1880-1920. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Swerdlow, Amy. Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Wiesenthal, Simon. Every Day Rembrance Day. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1986.

Zipperstein, Steven. The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985.

Zitron, Celia. New York City Teachers Union, 1916-1964: The Story of Educational and Social Commitment. New York: Humanities Press, 1969.

Articles

Berrol, Selma. "Education and Economic Mobility: The Jewish Experience in New York City, 1880-1920." *American Jewish Historical Society Quarterly* 65 (March 1976):

Bloom, Leonard. "A Successful Jewish Boycott of the New York City Public Schools, Christmas 1906." *American Jewish History* 70:2 (December 1980): 180-88.

Mulcahy, Richard. "Facing the American Inquisition: Responses to McCarthyism." *Maryland Historian* 17:2 (1986): 1-17.

Shaffer, Robert. "Women and the Communist Party, USA, 1930-1940." *Socialist Review* 9 (May 1979): 73-118.

---. "Jews, Reds and Violets: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Radicalism at New York University: 1916-1929." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 15:2 (1987): 46-83.

Wiegand, Kate. "The Red Menace, the Feminine Mystique and the Ohio Un-American Activities Commission: Gender and Anti-Communism in Ohio, 1951-1954." *Journal of Women's History* 3:3 (1992): 70-94.

Dissertations

Broidy, Ellen. “Enforcing the ABCs of Loyalty: Gender, Subversion and the Politics of Education in the New York City Public Schools, 1948-1954.” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 1997.

Miller, C.W. "Democracy in Education: A Study of How the AFT Met the Threat of Communist Subversion Through the Democratic Process." Ed.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1967.

Films

Klein, James & Julia Reichart. Seeing Red. 1983.